A DIALOGUE ON PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICE OF HINDUISM

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PRINTED AT

PRINTWAVE SERVICES PVT LTD.,
1, FIRST MAIN ROAD,
UNITED INDIA COLONY,
KODAMBAKKAM, MADRAS - 24.

FIRST EDITION 1992
1000 *COPIES*

THIS BOOK IS PUBLISHED WITH THE FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE OF TIRUMALA - TIRUPATI DEVASTHANAMS UNDER THEIR SCHEME - AID TO PUBLISH RELIGIOUS BOOKS.

BADRI PUBLICATION
COPIES OF THIS BOOK CAN BE HAD FROM
S. BADRINARAYANAN,
13, JANAKIRAM STREET,
WEST MAMBLAM, MADRAS - 33.
AND ALSO FROM BOOK SELLERS.

PRICE Rs.23/- POSTAGE Rs.7/-

PREFACE

India is a wonderful country of sacred temples of architectural excellence, sacred rivers and lofty hills with picturesque forests in their pristine glory. Sages and philosophers have gone from here to all parts of the world bearing the torch of wisdom and knowledge to lead the people along the path of Dharma. Religion is the right way of living and without it one will be as one in a rudderless ship without a compass in the midst of an unknown ocean. The purpose of religion is to bring about morality and discipline and create harmony among people.

In Hinduism there is only one God who is called by several names. As young men in these days of advanced science do not accept anything without reasoning, philosophical principles and practices in Hinduism are explained in this book in a simple succint, lucid and convincing manner. The significance of rituals and festivals, our scriptures, our Siddhantas, the achievements of our Saints and Preceptors, the concept of the soul, the several paths for salvation, the History of Hindu Renaissance and our cultural heritage are all explained in detail.

This book is not a mere translation of the Tamil Edition of my book but an elaboration and adaptation to answer convincingly the various queries and clear doubts that may arise in the minds of ardent students of religion as well as sceptics in India and abroad.

Copious quotations from the Bhagavad Gita, the Upanishads, the Brahma Sutras and the sayings of V.V.I.P.s like Bhagavan Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, Rajaji, Adi Sankara, Dr.Hogg, Dr.S.Radhakrishnan, Dr.K.M. Munshi, Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru, Gandhiji, Dr.Einstein and others are cited to support the statements.

Adjacent to this preface are given the translation from Tamil Edition of the blessings from H.H.Sri Sankarachariar of Kanchi Kamakoti Mutt and the blessings of H.H.Srimad Srirangam Andavan of Periasramam.

At the end of the book some of the reviews to the Tamil Edition are given to arouse the interest of the reader, and an index for ready reference.

BLESSINGS FROM SRI KANCHI KAMAKOTI PITATHIPATHI JAGATGURU SRI JAYENDRA SARASWATHI SANKARACHARIA SWAMY

When the world came into existence, religion also appeared. That religion is our Sanadhana Dharma, the Hindu religion.

1. The distinguishing feature of the Hindu religion is that it is not named after any particular person.
2. The same God that pervades every space and thing takes several forms.
3. Hinduism accepts Karma Theory.
4. Hindus respect and regard every natural object and natural event as sacred.
5. Hinduism has several such special characteristics as these. In the past the tenets of Hinduism were observed in pratical life from generation to generation. The way of life at present is not much intimately connected with religion. So training in religion has to be taught through books.

Several books have been published on Hinduism. We are glad that Athreya Sundara Narayanan has brought out this book as a dialogue between a Guru and his disciple. I hope people will be benefited by studying such books as this, improve their knowledge of religion and lead a religious life. We bless them to receive the grace of the Almighty.

NARAYANA SMRITI

(Translated from the blessings to the Tamil Edition)

The manuscript of this book was approved by the Tirumalai - Tirupathi Devastanams. I am sure this book will satisfy not only the earnest students of Hinduism but also the ardent Non-Hindus in India and abroad who would like to know the significance of our religious practices, culture and philosophy. I thank the printers for their cooperation. I pray to Lord Venkatesa to shower His choicest blessings on the readers of this book to have a happy, harmonious, long, religious life.

ATHREYA SUNDARA NARAYANAN.

BLESSINGS FROM SRIRANGAM LATE SRIMAD ANDAVAN SRIMAD VEDANTA RAMANUJA MAHA DESIKAN.

With a view to making the citizens of India, especially young men and women, belonging to several religions lead a harmonious life with a sense of national pride in our integrated cultural heritage Sri Sundara Narayanan has brought out this book.

We have great pleasure in recommending this book for their serious study and hope by acting up to the exhortations in it everyone will not only be personally benefited but also will enhance the glory of our sacred land.

We bless them to obtain the grace of God.

Sri Rangam Periasramam. **Sri Ranganatha Paduka Smriti**

(Translated from the blessings to the Tamil Edition)

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1. WHO AND WHERE GOD IS

DISCIPLE : Respected Sir! I wish to know about our Hindu Religion. At the outset kindly let me know what religion is.

PRECEPTOR (Guru) : Religion is the right way of living with faith inGod. Its purpose is to help one lead a pure and virtuous life and also lead one towards God.

D: May I know who God is?

P: God is one who transcends our mental thoughts and rules the universe.

D: Can we see Him?

P: This was the question put by Narendra (later **Swami Vivekananda**) to Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa when he first met him. **Sri Ramakrishna** said that he had seen God and that he would also helpNarendra see God with his mind's eye. To prove the existence of a thing three kinds of evidence are cited:

Pratyaksha anumaana aagamaah Pramaanaani
(Patanjali's yogasutra I.7).

They are perception, inference and competent scriptures. It is not easy to see God with our ordinary vision. We infer there is fire where there is smoke. The wonders of Nature, the regular movements of the heavenly bodies such as the moon, the sun and the stars, lead us to infer that there must be an intelligent master who controls them. The scriptures which were compiled by saints endowed with divine vision and knowledge proclaim that there is one God who is omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent.

D: Is god male or female?

P: Tamil Saint Nammalwar says in one of his hymns that God is neither male nor female. He is some mysteri ous person who can assume any form he likes. A

father loves his son but punishes him if he goes astr: On the other hand a mother is all merciful. She fo gives her son and tries to reform him by her affecti ate ways. Thus we worship God as a father and also a mother.

D: Is there one God or many gods?

P: Tamil saint **Thirumoolar** says, " God is one and belong to one family ". Narayana Upanishad says " **Brahma, Sa Siva, Sa Hari**". There is only one G who functions as Brahma for creation, Vishnu f protection and Siva for destruction. The Rig Vec says,

"Ekam Sat Vipra Bahudha Vadanti"

God is one but sages call him by several names. V call water as **pani in** Hindi, **aqua** in Latin a **Neer** in Tamil. You yourself has three names-o in the school record, another in your father's hou and third in your uncle's house. Muslims call G **Allah,** Jews **Jehova** and Christians **Father - i Heaven.** "The rose called by any other name w smell sweet" said **Shakespeare.**

D: Things exist in Nature and are produced by Natur Where is the need for a God to create them?

P: The tree comes from the seed and the seed from th tree.There should be an intelligent being who shou have made the seed or the tree first. When an eart ern pot is made the potter is said to be the **efficie cause**; the clay is the **material cause**. The pott makes the pot from clay with some instrument **Prakriti** or Nature has no intelligence. An intell gent person should have made use of non-intellige Nature to make all the things found in nature. Th intelligent master is God and He is the efficie cause.

D: Why should we worship God?

P: One who walks on ice requires an instrument such as skates to steady himself. One living in this world requires the grace of God to overcome obstacles.

D: Some deny the existence of God but realise the need for leading a moral life.

P: Even in the ancient Vedic Age there was a group of materialists called **Chaarvakaas.** They had strict rules for leading a moral life. They also helped the weak and the needy. They had no belief in God. They were called Athiests or non-believers in God. The communists in our days belong to the same category. But why should a man desist from committing a crime like murder without being seen by any body? It is because it is wrong and he believes that the all-seeing and all-powerful God watches every one of his deeds and is sure to come down upon him with punishment if he commits a sin. In the materialistic western countries why do rich men sometime get disgusted with life and commit suicide? A man believing in God gets comfort by his prayers and is confident that God will lead him along the right path and rid him of his troubles if he surrenders himself to Him.

D: Has God attributes?

P: Yes. We think that God is endowed with innumerable noble qualities so that He may sustain and favour his devotees and we may hold Him as an ideal. But he transcends all the Satvic (good), Rajasic (passionate) and Tamasic (dull) dispositions. The **Taittireeya Upanishad** says **Satyam, Jnanam, Anantam Brahma**. Brahma is existence, knowledge and Infinity. God is also said to possess **Nirmalam** or freedom from blemishes and **Aanandam** or bliss. According to **Advaitists,** the formless and nameless spirit

that is present everywhere is called **Nirguna Brahmam.** But for worshipping God (**Upasana**) we give Him a form, auspicious qualities and thousand names. This is **Isa** or **Saguna Brahmam. Acharya Sankara** says that we can not worship Nirguna Brahmam but only Saguna Brahmam. Vedavyasa (**Badarayana**) in his Brahma Sutras defines Brahmam as

"that omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent cause from which proceed the origin, sustenance and dissolution of the world".

Acharya Ramanuja regards God only as Saguna Brahmam a person endowed with innumerable noble qualities which he describes in his **Sriranga Gathyam.** Acharya Adi Sankara also has described these auspicious attributes in his commentary on Vishnu Sahasranaamam.

Satyam : God is never non-existent. He is the embodiment of truth.

Jnanam : God's knowledge is limitless. He knows what has happened, what is happening everywhere and what will happen in the future.

Infinity : God has neither beginning nor end. He exists for infinity without the bounds of space or time.

Aanandam : In **Taittireeya Upanishad** it is said in Aanandavalli that God s happiness is limitless and beyond expression. Only a spark of it is reflected in us.

Nirmalam : We can't even imagine that God has any blemish. He is the embodiment of perfection in all good and noble qualities.

God is said to possess six important noble qualities for his functions creation, sustenance and destruction, and is called Bhagavan.

1. **Jnanam** or knowledge as to what to give and what not to give His devotees. He is the embodiment of all knowledge. He is omnipotent.

2. **Veeriam** or freedom from fatigue.
3. **BALAM** or the power to sustain and support the world.
4. **AISVARYA** or sovereignity to control the universe.
5. **SAKTI** or the power to control anything.
6. **TEJAS** splendour or the power to overcome all obstacles.

AISVARYA includes **LILAVIBHUTI** or this universe and **NITYA VIBHUTI**, the heaven. As God possesses both, he is called **Iswar.** When God creates things in this Universe with **AISVARYA** and **VEERIAM,** He is called **PRATYUMNA.** When He sustains this world with **SAKTI** and **TEJAS,** He is called **ANIRUDDHA.** When he is engaged in the work of destruction with **JNANAM** and **BALA**, He is called **SANKARSHANA.**

In favouring His devotees he is said to exhibit certain other qualities.

1. **SAULABYA** or easy accessibility.
2. **SAUSILYA** or willingness to mix freely regardless of the devotee's caste or low status.
3. **VATSALYA** or showing love.
4. **DAYA** or sympathy.
5. **AUDARYA** or generosity.
6. **CHAURYA** or the power to destroy the devotee's enemies.
7. **KSHAMA** or the willingness to forgive the repentant.
8. **SARANAGADA VATSALVA** or protecting those who surrender to Him.
9. **PARIPOORNATHVA** or perfection in all attainments.
10. **KRUTHAGNATHVA** or doing good even for a small good action and other qualities.

D: Sir, where exactly is God?

P: Narayana Upanishad says:

"Yacca Kincit Jagat Sarvam

DrusyateSruyate apiva
Antarbahisca tat sarvam vyapia
Narayanassthitah.

God is everywhere. He pervades every space and time. He is immanent. He dwells inside and outside of everything we see or hear about. He is indweller (**antaryamin**) in the heart of everyone of us in atomic form. He is in water, fire, earth, air and ether (akash). There is no place or thing where he is not present.

D: How shall I know that God is everywhere?

P: Just as we find that salt is dissolved in water by tasting the salt water, we understand the presence of God everywhere by our intellect and devotion. Saint **Manickavachagar** says, "Just as fire is hidden in firewood and butter in milk, God is in-dweller in everything. Just as butter is separated by churning milk or curd, God is cognisible by means of our intellect and devotion (Bhakti)".

"His hands and feet are everywhere; his eyes, heads and mouths are facing in all directions; His ears are turned to all sides; He is enveloping all that exist." (Bhagavad Gita XIII - 13).

2. IS IMAGE WORSHIP NECESSARY?

D: Sir, people of some religions say God has no form.

P: God has no definite form but he can take any form. We give a beautiful human form to the idol in the temple to worship Him. The Saiva Sastra **SIVAGNANA SIDDHIYAR** says that we can worship God in three ways in form, in formless and as a symbol. **Saligrama** is a round black stone found in Gantak river in Nepal and this serves as a symbol to worship Vishnu. **Lingam** is a stone symbol which represents Siva.

D: Is it possible to worship a formless God?

P: Only when we become formless we can worship a formless God. Ice and water cannot mix unless they attain the same state. The Catholic Christians and Buddhists worship idols. **Muslims** have no idols. But some Muslims worship graves of saints. Why should Muslims turn Westward and pray facing a wall in a Mosque? Why do they write "Allah" on a card-board and adorn it with a garland? The word **"Allah"** itself is a symbol. The **Protestant Christians** also cannot pray without having an image in their minds. Sikhs worship the book **Adi Grantha.**

D: So I think image worship whether in the form of a symbol or an idol is necessary.

P: Yes. During the British Rule in India, a native prince while conversing with **Swami Vivekananda** decried image worship and called Indians barbarians. Swami Vivekananda asked the Minister who was there to spit on the portrait of the prince in the room. Both the prince and the minister were shocked. They became angry. The Swami said, "This portrait is only a paper; why do you get angry?" The Minister said, "Swamiji, the portrait represents the prince to whom due respect must be given". The Swamiji replied, "In the same way the worshipper regards the idol as God Himself and not as an object of stone or metal".

D: Some ignorant persons make fun of us because we worship idols.

P: Saint **Thirumoolar** in one of his verses says that when we regard a wooden elephant as an elephant, we forget about the wood. But when we think of the wood, the thought of its being in the form of an elephant disappears. Similarly when we worship the idol we think that God is present before us. Why should the protestant Christians turn their face towards the sky and pray? They think God is in the Heaven above and the

Sky serves as a symbol.

D: Did not saints like Sankarachariar, Ramanujachariar, Sambandar and Sri Ramakrishna worship idols?

P: They did. When we say God is omnipresent, He should certainly be present in the idol too. The idol raises spiritual thoughts in us and helps us to concentrate our mind and meditate on God.

D: What does Siva-linga represent?

P: It is the symbol of God who gives us good things in life. The bull before Him represents truth, bliss and good company. All idols are symbols.

D: What does the image of **Nataraja** represent?

P: Nataraja is the dancing Siva. This dance represents the cosmic dance of heavenly bodies which move according to the Universal law of gravitation-according to God's laws. His right hand assures the worshippers that they will have His blessings. The lifted foot shows that we should surrender to Him to get rid of ignorance.

D: Why should Vinayaka have an elephant's face?

P: **Vinayaka** means one who has no one superior to Himself. Siva wanted to destroy an elephant - faced Asura (giant) who was harassing the celestial beings and human beings. He took the form of an elephant and defeated the Asura. The Asura surrendered to Him taking the form of a rat. Vinayaka, the elephant-faced God, kept him as His Vehicle.

D: Why should Siva have a snake, an entangled lock of hair, a moon and the Ganga?

P: The snake represents His hidden power which controls the world. To save the people from floods Siva received the force of the Akash Ganga waters on His head with entangled locks of hair and let out the waters slowly. The moon being under a curse took refuge in Him and the all- merciful Siva took him on His head. Though his

consort Parvati is said to form part of Him on the left side, both represent one and the same God. **Parvati** represents kinetic energy.(Sakti)

D: What does the form of Muruga represent?

P: **Lord Muruga** is also called Skanda, Subramania, Vela, Shunmuga, Guha, Kumara and Kartikeya. Muruga means the Beautiful One. The Skanta Purana says that Siva Himself took the form of Muruga to destroy the Asura **Surapadman**. The Asura was transformed into a cock and a peacock, Muruga used the peacock as his vehicle and the cock in his flag. Destroying Asura means destroying the evil qualities in man. Kartikeya is said to possess six heads to protect the world in the six directions, East, West, North, South, above and below.

D: What does the idol of **Vishnu** signify?

P: It is said that all things are created by the **Pranava** sound 'Om' emanating from His conch (Sangu). His discus (**Chakra**) destroys Adharma or evil doers and ignorance in people. His protecting hand protects the devotees. The jewel **KAUSTUBAM** adorning his chest signifies that He is in the heart of everyone. His sword called **NANDAKI** destroys ignorance. His **GADHA** (Club) and SARANGAM (bow) will destroy the miseries that assail His devotees. Vishnu is said to possess the light blue colour of the ocean and of the sky. Just like the vast expanse of the sky Vishnu's presence is everywhere. He is sometimes described as having the colour of the cloud. Just as the cloud gives rain that is beneficial to living beings Lord Vishnu showers His grace on His devotees.

D: Sir, I saw a picture of **Krishna** dancing on a five-headed cobra. What does this signify?

P: This shows that if we control our **five senses** we will get

divine grace.

D: God is everywhere. Why should we have a temple?

P: Water is everywhere under the surface of the earth. But to get it we have to dig a well to take water for our use.

3. HINDU SCRIPTURES

D: Revered Sir! Kindly let me know the important scriptures in the Hindu Religion.

P: They are the **Vedas**, the **Upanishads**, the **Itihasas**, the **Puranas**, the **Aagamas**, the **Dharsanas**, **Prayers and Mantras.**

D: What are **Vedas**?

P: The word **Veda** comes from the root 'Vid' which means knowledge.The Vedas give us the true knowledge about God. They were revealed to **Rishis** or sages by God during their transcendental meditation. The Vedas have been classified as **Rig, Yajur, Saama** and **Atharvana** by Sage **Vyasa.** They have been handed down from generation to generation by hearing and memory and so they are called Srutis meaning what is heard.

D: What do these Vedas say about Sir?

P: The **Rig Veda** praises God's glory. 'RIG' means praise. The **Yajur Veda** describes the performance of sacrifice etc. for the worship of God. 'YAJ' means Yagna or sacrifice or religious performance. The **Saama Veda** sings of God's grace. The hymns were taken from Rig Veda and set to music. The **Atharvana Veda** is full of Mantras and Tantras for overcoming the enemy, for getting riches etc. It includes Atharva Veda which deals with politics, botany, medicines, Zoology, astronomy and other sciences. The Vedas have

also been broadly divided into two main sections - **Karmakanda** and **Jnanakanda.** The Karmakanda deals with sacrifices and other religious rites. Each Veda consists of **Samhitas, Brahmanas,** and **Aranyakas.**

The Rig Veda **Samhita** has 1017 hymns. They are prayers to God. The Yajur Veda and the Sama Veda Samhitas are said to be several but only a few of them are available now. The Atharvana samhitas have incantations to deal with evil spirits.

The **Brahmanas** are prose texts explaining the meaning and purpose of sacrifices and the method of performing them. The Brahmanas by Aitereya and Jaimini are important.

The **Aranyakas** are forest texts intended for the use of old men in forests.

The **Jnana Kaanda** consists of Upanishads which are considered to be the end of Vedas or Vedanta. The Upangas, the Vedangas, the UpaVedas and Smriti texts help us understand the Vedas. **Smriti** means what is to be remembered.

D: What are **Upanishads** Sir?

P: 'Upa' means near; 'ni' means certainly; 'sat' means removes. The disciple sits near the teacher and gets the knowledge which certainly drives away his miseries and ignorance, and gives him everlasting bliss near God. Upanishad also means that this knowledge got from the teacher will certainly help the soul reach the Highest Self or God.

The Upanishads are said to be 108 in number, but the ten Upanishads namely **Isa, Kena, Kata, Prachna, Mundaka. Mandoogya, Taittireeya,**

Aythareya, Chaandogya and Brahad-aranyaka Upanishads are considered to be most important among them. These speak about the Highest Self, the individual self, their characteristics, the various Vidhyas for Upasana or meditation and the sure means of reaching the Highest Self or God.

Dr. Schopenhacier, a German philosopher, says, "**In the whole world there is no study so beneficial and so elevating as that of the Upanishads. It has been the solace of my life". Dr. Einstein** said that he got inspiration from the study of Gita and Upanishads.

D: What are Vedangas?

P: The Vedangas help us learn the Vedas.

They are six in number.

1. The SIKSHA tells us how to pronounce the Veda Mantras.This has been explained by sages like Paanini.

2. CHANDAS: deal with metre. Both Siksha and Chandas are useful for recitation.

3. VYAKARAN: or Grammar has been explained in detail by sage Paanini.

4. NRUKTA is the dictionary or meaning of words. Vyakaran and Nrukta are necessary for understanding Vedas.

5. JYOTISHA: This tells us about the exact auspicious Star, Karana, Yoga (auspicious time) Titi or the particular lunar day among the fifteen lunar days, the day of the week and other astronomical and astrological data for performing a ceremony.

6. KALPA: This gives us information about the time and mode of performance of a

ceremony.

SUTRAS deal with rituals. GRIHYA SUTRAS deal withdomestic ceremonies. DHARMA SUTRAS deal with laws to be followed by people and SULVA SUTRAS deal with rules for construction of houses.

D: What are Upa Vedas?

P: They are four in number.

1. AYURVEDA: This science of keeping mind and body healthy deals with diseases and their remedy. This has been explained by WAGPATA, DANVANTARI, CHARAKA and others.

2. DHANUR VEDA or the science of archery was dealt with in detail by sage Viswamitra.

3. GANDHARVA VEDA is the science of music and dance. This was explained by sage Bharata.

4. ARTHA SASTRA deals with politics, administration, botany, astronomy and other subjects. Sixty four kinds of arts and sciences have been written and explained by **Kautilya** and other sages.

D: What are Upangas, Sir?

P: These are (1) Puranas (2) Nyaya, (3) Mimamsa and (4) Dharma Sastras. These belong to Smriti texts.

D: What are **Smriti** texts?

P: These are texts which have to be remembered always. They tell us about rules that should govern a society for its welfare. Manu, Parasara, Yagnavalkia, Angirasa, Apastamba and other sages have composed Dharma Sastras for our righteous conduct. These Sastras lay down rules for the different classes of our Society for performing their duties. These rules are liable to changes according to the changes taking place in our society. But the Sruti principles found in Vedas about soul, love, God, non - violence etc. are true for eternity. The

Itihasas, the Puranas, the Aagamas and the Darsanas are all Smriti texts.

D: What are Itihasas, Sir?

P: ITIHASAS establish our tradition and culture. We have two important Itihasas, namely, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. These two epics tell us through stories how our forefathers practised the principles of right conduct. These epics contain also the teachings of Vedas embedded in them. These epics and puranas are considered by some scholars as allegories.

D: What is the Ramayana?

P: The Ramayana is the story of Rama, an incarnation (Avatar) of Lord Vishnu. The story was composed by SAGE VALMIKI in 24 000 Sanskrit verses. It has been translated into Tamil verses by Poet KAMBAR and Hindi verses by poet TULASIDAS. The Ramayana is popular not only in India, which is the place of its origin but also in other countries like Thailand, Combodia and Indonesia where India had spread its culture long, long ago. Several kings of Thailand have been named Rama. Rama was strong, handsome, learned, truthful, kind, virtuous, pious, filial and brave. He was perfect in every way and an ideal example to all. Such traits as devotion to the preceptor, carrying out his father's commands, brotherly love, helping friends, protecting those who have surrendered to Him and mercy even to the enemy at the battlefield make Rama an ideal man.

Sita is an ideal example to all women for following her husband to the forest, for sharing his misfortunes and for her chastity. Rama's administra-

tion for the welfare of his people is a lesson to be followed by all rulers.

D: What is Mahabharata, Sir?

P: It is the story of the Pandavas who were ill-treated by their cousins, the Kauravas, and sent to the forest. It teaches us that gambling will ruin a family and virtue will win over vice at last. The Pandavas defeated the Kauravas in the battle of Kurushetra. Lord Krishna gave his army to the Kauravas as promised but without wielding weapons he became the charioteer for Arjuna and guided him and the Pandavas in the war. That shows that inspite of a mighty army God's grace and guidance are required for gaining victory.

Lord Krishna tells Arjuna who was unwilling to fight against his own kith and kin and preceptors that his duty as a warrior and ruler was to fight against injustice. The dying **Bhishma** on the battle-field taught Yudhistra the thousand names of Vishnu and also the rules of right conduct which every one should follow in life. Lord Krishna's advice to Arjuna forms the famous **Bhagavad Gita.**

D: The Bhagavad Gita has been praised by even westerners. What does it say about?

P: The Bhagavad Gita has been a source of inspiration to millions of people for several centuries. Its teachings have been accepted by scholars of different schools of philosophy. It also deals with problems in life and offers practical solutions. It is deemed to be the most grandly conceived philosophical poem. It has been translated into English, French, Russian and other languages. Lord Krishna advises Arjuna to perform his duties

without caring for the fruits or results. He tells him about the nature of the soul which is immortal. When a man dies, it is the body that dies and not the soul. The Bhagavad Gita exhorts everybody who is in despondency to stand up and face the challenge. Lord Krishna says;

"Whatsoever you do, whatsoever you eat, whatsoever you give, whatsoever austerities you practise - do that as an offering to Me".

B.G. IX-20

"Whoever coasider me as their own, and engage themselves in contemplation and worship of me I assure those devotees to grant their worldly and spiritual requirements (Salvation)" (B.G.IX-22). In Chapter X Bhagavan speaks of His being the best in everything or class of persons. This means that every soul is potentially divine and divinity is manifested when one shows nobility or excellence.

Gita is a manual of ethics and metaphysics. Upanishads are cows; Gita is milk; Krishna is a cowherd and Arjuna is a calf who drinks the milk. Not only Arjuna but all of us can consider ourselves to be calves and drink the substance of Upanishads from the Gita. The Gita is not merely a Dharma Sastra teaching ethics. It is a Yoga Sastra as well teaching Union with God and Brahma Vidhya or knowledge of God.

The Gita insists on the conquest of senses and on the discipline of body and mind. It condemns excessive asceticism, excessive ritualism and

false penance subjecting oneself to terrible mortification which are not ordained by scriptures. The teaching of morality without religion gets no support from any scripture. The Gita recognises the force of natural dispositions in man and teaches that everyone should make the best use of one's natural gifts for the service of God.

"Svadharma" **Aurobindo** says, "does not mean that a washerman should do nothing but wash clothes". The Gita far from teaching men to turn away from this world to become monks and care for salvation prescribes a graded discipline for the individual advocating four Aasramas, four Varnas according to dispositions and four Purusharthas (aims in life).

A man qualifies himself for the final stage of contemplative life only after discharging the debt he owes to society by his service. It says, "Having engaged in the good of all people, the devotees come to me". **Gandhiji** says, "The Gita is the universal mother guiding us through the trials and temptations of life. A true votary of the Gita does not know what disappointment is. The recitation of the Gita verses will support you in your trials and console you in your distress".

"**Bala Gangadhara Tilak** says, "It is a priceless gem in the whole literature of the world". The Gita consists of eighteen chapters dwelling on yoga of knowledge, yoga of devotion, yoga of meditation, yoga of works, the three dispositions, cosmic form, the yoga of manifestation, the yoga of imperishable absolute, and the yoga of renunciation and release. We regard Lord Krishna as an Avatar of God.

D: What is an **Avatar**, Sir?

P: Lord Krishna says in Bhagavad Gita,

"Paritraanaaya saadhunaam
Vinaasaaya cha dushkrutaam
Dharma samsthaapanaarthaaya
Sambhavaami yugay yugay"
B.G. IV - 8

"For protecting the virtuous, for punishing the wicked and for establishing righteousness, I am born from age to age whenever it is necessary". Avatar is coming down as incarnation of God. Ten important Avatars of God are mentioned. **Matsya Avatar** as fish, **Koorma Avatar** as tortoise and **Varaha Avatar** as boar were for saving the earth. **Narasimha Avatar** partly as lion and partly as man was to destroy the Asura Hiranya Kasipu and save His devotee Prahalada. **Vamana Avatar** was to subdue the Asura King Bali. **Parasurama Avatar** was to destroy the wicked kings. **Rama Avatar** was to destroy the cruel Rakshasa king Ravana, to demonstrate how to lead an ideal life and to establish Ram Rajya. **Krishna Avatar** was to help the Pandavas to demonstrate the power of virtue over vice and to teach the world Dharma. **Buddha Avatar** was to propagate the message of love.

It is said that God will be born in the tenth Avatar as **Kalki** to destroy the world which will become too bad to be reformed and to establish a new cycle of Yugas or ages Apart from these incarnations there may be part incarnations in such men as Gandhiji.

When man progresses to perfection and exhibits divine attributes or godliness, we regard him fit for worship and say he is an Avatar of God as in the person of **Bhagavan Ramakrishna**. One

may find in these Avatars support for Darwin's Theory of Evolution.

D: What are **Yugas**, Sir?

P: Four ages or Yugas have been mentioned in our scriptures. They come in cycles one after another. The **Kruta (Satya)Yuga** is the Golden age. The second is **Threta Yuga** or the Silver Age. Third is the **DvaparaYuga** or the Bronze Age; the fourth is the **Kali Yuga** or the Iron Age. It is said that from one Yuga to the next the generations of men become more and more vicious and in this Kali Yuga when men become too wicked to be reformed, God takes birth as **Kalki** to destroy this world and introduce a new cycle of Yugas starting from Satya Yuga. This destruction may come as **Pralaya** or rising of the ocean or flood. It may even come as atomic wars.

D: What are **Puranas** ?

P: Pura means ancient and Nava means modern. The authors of Purana make use of old and established values and rules for right conduct to embed them in stories or historical accounts to teach the public, just as we coat a bitter pill with sugar to make it palatable. Eighteen Puranas are considered important. They are **Brahma, Padma, Vishnu, Siva, Bhagavada, Pavishya, Naradeeya, Maarkanda, Agni, Brahma, Kaivartha, Linga, Matsya, Koorma, Varaaha, Vamana, Garuda, Skanda** and **Brahmaanda Puranas.** We should give importance to their philosophical teachings rather than to the veracity of historical events or stories of Devas.

D: Sir, what are Aagamas?

P: Aagamas are rules for Puja or worship of God.

They tell us how idols should be made, consecrated and placed in temples, the rules for architecture and construction of temples, rules for daily worship, about the celebration of festivals, about collection of materials for worship and about the fitness of the priest for performing Puja. Vaishnava Aagamas are of two kinds. They are **Pancharatra** and Vykanasa. There are certain differences between them in the mode of worship. Meykandar has explained Siva Aagamas. Ramanuja and Alavandar have explained the Pancharatra Aagama. **Sakta Aagama** is for the worship of Sakti or Ambal.

D: Sir, what are **Darsanas?**

P: **Darsanas** are philosophical treatises which are to be learnt to get a clear idea of God, the Soul and the universe. Hindu philosophy is not a mere enquiry. It is a way of life. It sublimes life. There are six Darsanas, which are **Nyaya, Vaiseshika, Sankhya, Yoga, Mimamsa** and **Vedanta.**

D: Sir, what is **Nyaya?**

P: **NYAYA:** This has been explained by sage **Gautama** in 5 chapters. The followers of Nyaya system of philosophy developed an original system of logic. This system uses perception, inference, examples and other evidences for ascertaining truth.

D: What is **Vaiseshika?**

P: **VAISESHIKA:** This is the system of philosophy known for its Visesha or particularity. It was propounded by Sage **Kanada** in 10 chapters. He lists seven categories of things - substance, quality, action, universality, particularity, inherence (existence) and non-existence. Kanada was the

first to put forward the **Atomic Theory.** He said that things in the world have been formed by the combination of atoms.

The **Naiyayikas** and the **Vaiseshikas** are called **Darkikas** because they come to a conclusion in everything only after logical reasoning. They accept absolute differences between God and the individual self. They say that only after entering the body the soul gets intelligence.

D: Sir, what is **Yoga?**

P: The **Yoga** system of philosophy was expounded by Sage **Patanjali** in the form of **Sutras** or aphorisms. It teaches eight steps Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, etc. to get God-realisation. Concentration of the mind by withdrawal of the mind from external objects and meditation are important. **Sutra** means clues to memory aids in a condensed form. They should be concise, unambiguous, deal with all aspects and give the essence.

D: Sir, what is **Sankhya?**

P: **Sankhya.** This is the school of philosophy expounded by sage **KAPILA** in six chapters. Without accepting the existence of God he says that **Prakriti** or primordial Nature is the cause of the world which is formed when Nature expands into 24 material principles. The **Purusha** or the soul is the 25th principle and this differs from all the material principles on account of its intelligence. The notion of egoity is due to the association of the intelligent principle with Nature. Nature is said to possess the qualities **Sattva** (goodness), **Rajas** (passion) and **Tamas** (darkness).

According to the Sankhyas one should under-

stand for final release the true nature of the primordial Nature, that of its modifications and the nature of the individual soul (**Purusha**). The individual soul is said to do nothing and whatever is done is said to be done by **Pradhana** or Prakriti.The Gita accepts the Sankhya view of creation but makes the Pradhana subservient to the Supreme Brahman.

D: Sir, what is **Mimamsa?**

P: **Mimamsa:** This word Mimamsa means enquiry or investigation. The investigation is into the ritualistic part of the Vedas as well as into the philosophical part also. The former is called **Poorva Mimamsa** and the latter **Uttara Mimamsa** or Sariraga Mimamsa or **Vedanta.** The poorva or **Karma Mimamsa** was explained by **Sage Jaimini** by Sutras or aphorisms in 12 chapters. It deals with Yagnas or sacrifices and their results. It also contains **Mantras** which are sacred formulae. The **Karma Kanda** contains Mantras and **Brahmanas.** The Brahmanas deal with the performance of sacrifices.

D: Sir, what is **Vedanta?**

P: **VEDANTA SUTRAS** are also called **Brahma Sutras**. The Brahma Sutras composed by sage **Badarayana** (who is considered to be **Vedavyasa** himself) contains 545 Sutras in four chapters each containing four sections. There are altogether 156 **Adhikaranas** or topics, which are discussed. These Sutras are the essence of **Upanishads.** The Upanishads contain statements which seem to be contradictory. The Brahma Sutras explain such portions and clear doubts.

But some of these Brahma Sutras themselves are interpreted differently by Acharyas **Ramanuja, Adi Sankara, Madhava, Neelakanta** and others according to their Siddhantas or systems of philosophy they propound. **Vallaba** and **Nimbarkar** have also written commentaries for Brahma Sutras. Badarayana's Sutras are considered to be the best. The sutras deal with the nature of the individual self, the Brahmam or the Higher Self, the relation between them, creation of the Universe, the fate of souls after death, the various **Upasanas** or Vidhyas for meditation and the nature of liberation.

: Sir, kindly tell me about the important **prayer books** in our religion.

: The twelve Saiva Thirumurais like **Thevaram** praise Lord Siva, **Dhivya Prabandam** which is a collection of about 4000 verses of Alwars praise Lord Vishnu. **Vishnu Sahasra Namam, Aditya Hridayam, Purusha Suktam, Rudram, Sri Suktam, Durga Suktam, Lalitha Sahasranamam** and **Sri Stuti** are some of the prayers in Sanskrit. The **Purusha Suktam** says that God is everywhere, that all eyes and heads of living beings are His and that He is in the heart of everyone, Narayana suktam says that He is called Siva, Brahma, Indra, Hari etc., that he is present in everything and that he appears during transcendental meditation like a ray of lightning amidst the dark clouds.

Sir, what are **Mantras?**

The **Mantra** or incantation protects one who thinks of it and recites it. The particular angel or Deva of the Mantra is said to shower his

grace. The Mantra may be recited loudly. It may be recited with the movement of the lips only without being heard. But the best method is to repeat the Mantra within the mind thinking of its meaning. The Vaishnava prayer Mantra **Ashtakshara** is **"OM NAMO NARAYANA"**. The Saiva Moola Mantra is **"NAMA SIVAYA"**. It is **Panchakshara** or five-lettered. Every Mantra begins with the **Pranava** sound 'A-U-M or Om' A represents the omnipotent God, M represents Individual souls and 'U' refers to the dependence or relation of individual soul to God. This has also been interpreted differently.

D: Sir, which is said to be the best of all Mantras?

P: Lord Krishna says in Bhagvad Gita, "Of all the Mantras I am the **Gayatri"**. This Gayatri Mantra is to be repeated 28 or 108 times in the morning just before sunrise, at noon, and in the evening at sunset after ablution Mantras with water and Pranayama. This worship is called **Sandhya Vandana.** 'Gayatri' means protecting one who worships with this Mantra. This Mantra is in **Rig Veda.** By reciting this, one is said to be freed from all sins committed unwittingly.

Om bhoor bhuvas suvah, Tat savithur vareniyam, bhurgo-devasya dheemahi, Dheeyo yonah prachodayat.

This mantra means: "Let us meditate on God who is the creator and ruler of all the worlds, who is in the form of magnificent, radiant, divine light (the sun) and who rouses our intellect, skill and energy (to tread on the path of virtue)"

Booh-earth; Bhuvah-World of Siddhas, suvah-Paradise. Every mantra usually begins with 'Om' which represents God. Tat-that; Savituh-light or sun; Varenium-magnificent; bhurgodevasya-radiant divine; Dheemahi - Let us meditate; Dhiah-intellect, energy and skill; Yah-who; nah-our; Prochodayat-rouses.

D: Why are we asked to keep the Mantras secret?

P: In our Sastras we are asked to keep nine things secret:

Ayur, vitham, gruha chithram, mantram,
aushadam, sangame, daana, maana,
apamaana, nava koshyami sarvada.

Information about our (1) age (2) money transactions (3) Family quarrels, (4) Mantra (5) ingredients of a medicine (6) husband-wife experiences (7) alms given (8) praise and (9) disgrace are to be kept secret. The Mantra should be regarded sacred and is to be kept secret to avoid troubles from those who are not well-disposed towards us. The Mantra should be taught only to those who are good and pious. Otherwise it will be like a garland of flowers in the hands of a monkey.

D: There are thousand names in **Vishnu Sahasranamam.** Does every name have a particular meaning?

P: Yes. The names describe the auspicious attributes of Vishnu. **Vishnu** means one who pervades every space and thing. **Achyutha** means one who has no changes like birth and death. **Narayana** means one who has both living beings and non-living things in Himself; or one who is present in both living beings and non-living things. **Damodara**

means one who has the worlds in His abdomen or one who was tied with a cord round his waist by Yasoda. **Hari** is one who destroys our sins and our cycle of birth and death if only we show our devotion and surrender ourselves to Him. Also Hari is one who is of the green colour of the hills.

Madhu Sudhana means one who destroyed the giant Madhu. **Hrishi Kesa** is one who gives us the rays of the sun or one who is the master of senses. **Madhava** means that He has His consort Lakshmi in Him or one who is the master of all arts. **Sudarsana** means one who teaches us the right philosophy that leads to our salvation or one who possesses the Sudharsana wheel which represents His mind.

He is called **Krishna** because He is black in colour or because He possesses Sat, Chit and Aananda (truth, knowledge and bliss) or because he was the head of the cowherds. He is called **Srinivasa** because Lakshmi, His spouse, is ever present in his chest. He is called **Sridharan** as He has Lakshmi in Him. He is called **Vasudeva** as he covers the world with his Maya or delusion. As He transcends all space and time and is infinite he is called **Ananta.** As He has lotus in His naval, He is called **Padmanabha.** As Brahma and Siva are in Him or because He destroyed the demon Kesika, He is called **Kesava.** As he has all the six auspicious attributes, He is called **Bhagavan.**

D: Sir, how many worlds are said tc exist?

P: The seven upper worlds are **Bhu, Bhuva, Suva, Maha, Jana, Tapa** and **Satya** worlds. The seven

nether worlds are **Athala, Vithala, Suthala, Talatala, Rasatala, Mahatala** and **Patala.** In our present knowledge of science we cannot identify all these worlds. Indians are said to be in **Jambu Dweepa, Bhaarata Varsha, Bharata Kanda** and South of the **Meru** mountain.

D: Sir, what is **Dharma?**

P: Dharma is that which protects a person observing its rules and prevents him from going to hell. In the Dharma Sastras formulated by **Manu, Yagnavalkya, Parasara, Gautama, Angirasa, Vyasa, Apastamba, Brihaspaty, Narada** and other seers, duties to be performed by every one daily in the four Aasramas or stages of life are prescribed.

4. MODES OF WORSHIP

D: Revered Sir, why do we worship God?

P: God is the embodiment of truth, knowledge, infinity, bliss and purity. We cannot worship a nameless and formless God. **Adi Sankara** recommended for worship the forms of **Vishnu, Siva, Ambika, Vinayaka, Surya** and **Subramania.** He composed prayers and showered praises on their auspicious qualities. **Aradhana** means worship. We worship God because it is our duty to serve Him and please Him and thank Him for giving us the human form. We worship Him also to get His blessings for the fulfilment of our desires.

D: Are there different methods of worship?

P: Individuals worship God at home and in temples. People take part in the community worship in temples for the welfare of all. Before worshipping God, we take bath, wear clean clothes and religious marks if any, and collect materials like sandal, pure water, incense, camphor, Tulsi leaves, flowers, fruits, Kumkum etc.

Patram pushpam phalam toyam
Yo may bhaktiya prayachchati
Tadaham bhaktyupahrutam
asnami prayatatmanah

Lord Krishna says in Gita, (IX, 26) "Even if one is available among Tulsi leaf, flower, fruit and water and is offered to me with sincere devotion, I accept the offer from the devotee with pleasure and am satisfied as if I have taken food".

Sixteen acts of worship are performed such as **Dhyaana** (meditation), **Aavaahana** (requesting God by incantation to enter the idol), **Sthapana** (requesting Him to be in the idol), **Arkhya** (washing hands with water), **Paathya** (washing the feet with water), clothing, offering sandal paste, incense and flowers, showing different lights, offering food, Mantra Japa, showing lighted camphor and prostration. Showing a mirror, adorning with jewels and fanning are also done. When we invite a guest to our house we offer him water to clean his hands, feet and mouth, offer

him a seat and then food.

D: Why do we show lights and burn incense?

P: It symbolises the driving away the darkness of ignorance and getting the light of right knowledge with the grace of God.

D: Why do we offer fruits or food? How can the idol take it?

P: We regard the idol as God Himself and not an object of metal. We first offer food to God and think that he has tasted it. Then we distribute the food to others present there and take the rest for ourselves. The offering of food or fruit is called **Sacrifice.** By so doing God will bestow on us the happiness that we desire. **Gita** says, **"He is indeed a thief who enjoys things without offering to God first. The goodman who eats what is left over after sacrifice is freed from all sins. But the wicked who prepare food for their own sake eat sin"** (B.G. III - 12, 13).

The worshipper will get the grace of God if he practises non-violence, control of mind and truth, if he is free from greed and has compassion, and if he desires the welfare of others also as for himself.

D: Do we worship God with a purpose?

P: There are **four types of worshippers** as Lord Krishna says (B.G. VII-16). They are

1) **AARTHA,** the man in distress who desires to be rid of his miseries,

2) **ARTHAARTI,** the man who seeks riches,

3) **JIJNASU,** the man who seeks knowledge about Atma and

4) **JNANI** the man who after getting knowledge seeks liberation from the cycle of birth and death.

"Of these **Jnani** (or Mumukshu) is the best because he is dear to Me and I am dear to him. **Whatever may be the form which each devotee seeks to worship, in that form do I make his faith steadfast, and his desires are granted by me**" Thus speaketh Lord Krishna. (B.G. VII - 17 to 22).

D: Why do Hindus wear marks such as Naama or Vibhuti on their forehead?

P: **Naama** is worn with white clay uttering 12 names of Lord Vishnu and so it is called Naama. This Naama represents God's feet. The red mark with turmeric in the middle symbolises **Goddess Lakshmi** who showers good fortune. The white clay in the mark reminds us that even crowned kings become dust one day and so we should be rid of our pride. The Naamam makes us remember God always while we do our duties and leave the result to God. The **VIBHUTI** is got after burning cow's dung. This Vibhuti reminds one that a person gets God's grace after burning away the five faults of desire **(Kama)**, anger **(Krota)**, delusion **(Moha)**, miserliness **(Loba)** and pride **(Matha).**

D: What is the purpose of temple worship? Are there rules for such worship?

P: Yogis used **Dahara Vidhya** of worshipping God who is supposed to be in the small space in their hearts. Some lit up fire and worshipped it. Temples were built for community worship by ordinary people according to Saiva, Vaishnava and Sakta Aagama rules.

Idols were installed in temples. Daily wor-

ship and special worship are being performed by priests according to Aagama rules. If the temple is polluted by thieves, special purification ceremony is conducted as per rules. Daily Puja is performed once, twice, thrice or five times according to the income and convention of the temple.

The worshipper takes bath, wears clean clothes and his religious mark and goes to the temple in the morning and also after sunset. In some temples in South India the male worshipper is forbidden to wear pants, shirt or upper cloth. The worshippers should leave their footwear outside and wash their feet before entering the temple. On seeing the tall tower he makes his obeisance as he considers it to be the feet of God. He goes to the altar near the flag staff (Dwajasthamba) and prostrates with eight parts of his body -- chin, two shoulders, two hands, two ears and head touching the ground. This is **Ashtanga Namaskar.** Women make **Panjanga Namaskar** with five parts of the body-head, two hands and two knees touching the ground. When he rises up, he should feel that he has left off baser dispositions and has become pure in mind.

Chanting the **Moola Mantra** he bows before **Vinayaka** in the Siva temple or **Garuda** in the Vishnu temple.

Before going into the Sanctum Sanctorum he bows before the statues of **Dwarapalakas** (gate-keepers) to get their permission to enter. Then he prostrates before the main idol and prays offering fruits and flowers to the priest. The priest returns them after offering to God. He gives the worshipper a spoon of sacred water and Tulsi leaves in a Vishnu temple or Vibhuti-ash in a Siva temple. He goes round the inner Prahara and the outer-one also. He sits near the flag staff and meditates uttering the Moola Mantra. He comes out with peace of mind and noble thoughts.

Those who have not taken bath and worn new clothes, those who are polluted due to birth or death at home and women during menstrual period should not enter temples. People should not talk of worldly affairs with friends in the temples. No one should pollute the temple by answering calls of nature in the Praharas or in the vicinity of the temple.

5. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF RITUALS AND FESTIVALS

D: The so-called radical youngsters say that elders are led by superstition to celebrate meaningless festivals and perform some ceremonies. What is the significance of festivals and rituals, Sir?

P: To drive home the principles in our religion and for emotional participation we celebrate festivals and perform rituals. Why do we celebrate Gandhiji's birthday or Republic Day? Is it not just to remember the teachings of Gandhiji? Should we not remember that we got our freedom after hundreds of years and after a hard struggle? Religious festivals make us observe the religious principles and foster integration among the members of the communities.

To a youth who made fun of religious festivals "**Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa** gave some rice to sow. No plant came out because the rice was without embryo and husk. "So to make the seed of religious principle sprout in the minds of people festivals are necessary" said Bhagavan Ramakrishna.

D: Sir, what are the various **ceremonies** which a Hindu has to perform in his life time?

P: When a married woman becomes pregnant **Pumsavana** and **Srimantham** are celebrated by offering prayers to God to make the delivery easy and safe. As soon as the child is born, **Jaadha Karma** is celebrated by distributing sweets. On the 11th day, the child is formally **named.** At the end of one year **Aayur-Homa** is performed, praying to God for a long, happy, healthy and prosperous life for the child. When the child is sent to school in the third or fourth year **Vidhya Aarambam** is performed praying for a glorious educational career for the child. **Upanayanam** is celebrated in the seventh year for the male child who has to wear the holy thread. **Marriage** is celebrated after the 21st year. Then the **61st birth day** and the 100th full-moon **(80th year)** are celebrated.

Every year he performs the annual **Sraddha,** the ceremony to his father and mother if they are dead. This is done to remember them, to show our gratitude to them and to enable their souls earn the grace of God. On every New Moon day **Dharpana** (Dhil & Arpana) is done for forefathers with sesame seeds, Dharpa grass and water by one who has lost his father to satisfy the soul of his forefathers. Just as a child studies one class after another, the spiritual principles have to be learnt step by step. Rituals and festivals are necessary to learn and remember religious principles.

D: Sir, kindly tell me about our important **religious festivals.**

P: The **Dasara** is celebrated for ten days from the New Moon Day at the end of September in the month of Puratasi or Kanya. Durga, Lakshmi, Saraswati and other idols are exhibited and worshipped. On the 10th day **Saraswati Pooja** or worship of the Goddess of learning is performed. **Durga** is the consort of Lord Siva and the Goddess of Sakti or energy. **Lakshmi,** consort of Lord Narayana, is the Goddess of wealth, prosperity, beauty, compassion and auspicious qualities.

The **Deepavali** is the festival of rows of light. It is celebrated on the night previous to the New Moon Day in Tulam Month or the later half of October. It was on that day **Lord Krishna** destroyed the demon **Narakasura** who was giving trouble to the people. At the time of his death Narakasura requested Lord Krishna to ask the people to celebrate the day of his death every year. The boon was granted. So we celebrate Deepavali by firing crackers, eating sweets and lighting rows of lamps. The significance of this festival is that we celebrate the defeat of evil forces and entertain the light of virtues.

In the month of Kartigai (November-December) **Kartigai Deepam** is celebrated on the full-moon day. The significance of this festival is also to burn the evil thoughts in our mind and get the light of right knowledge. In the next month of Margasirsha, devotees get up early in the morning before sunrise, take bath, wear clean clothes and go along streets, singing **Thirupavai** and **Thiruvempavai.** In Tamilnadu women observe **Pavainonbu** . On the first day of Makara month corresponding to 15th of January

Pongal festival is celebrated by offering cooked rice with ghee and sugar (sweet Pongal) to God **Surya Narayana** as a mark of our gratitude for his help in making the crops grow and mature.

In the month of Kumba or Masi **Sivarathri** is celebrated. In the next month of Phalguni (March) **Holi Festival** is celebrated in North India. In the month of Chitra (April) **Sri Rama Navami** is celebrated. In the next month **Vaikasi Visakam** is celebrated.In the month of Simha(August) **Krishna's birthday** or **Gokula Ashtami** and **Vinayaka Chaturti** are celebrated. **Vaikunta Ekadasi** is celebrated in Margasirsha month to remind people that their goal in life is attainment of salvation.

D: During festivals in temples why are idols taken to the streets?

P: To commemorate the services of devotees like Alwars, Nayanmars and Acharyas, their birth days are celebrated in temples. In every temple the annual **Brahma Utsavam** is celebrated for ten days usually in Phalguni or Chitrai month. Every day the idol is decorated and taken in Palanquins or Vahanas along streets. When the idol is brought before a house, the inmates of the house worship and offer fruits. They feel as if God Himself has visited their homes. On the **Car Festival Day**, the idol is taken in the decorated wooden car and pulled by people belonging to all castes. No caste feeling is shown. Thus the festivals help remove social differences and enable us to lead a spiritual way of life.

6. OUR AIMS IN LIFE

D: Respected Sir! What should be our aim in life?

P: Let me first know what your ambition in life is.

D: I wish to become a doctor. It all depends upon the availability of a seat in the Medical College. I must earn well and help relations and poor people. I must also lead a virtuous life.

P: It will not be enough if one earns well in life and helps others. To be born as a human being is itself an opportunity to lead a spiritual life and try to get release from the cycle of births and deaths. This life should be a pilgrim's progress. After equiping yourself with education you must choose a profession and earn money justly. Then you should get married, help others and enjoy life. In the fourth stage of your life you should intensify your efforts to get salvation or Moksha.

All these four aims, called **Purusharthas,** are **Dharma, Artha, Kaama and Moksha** (charity and virtuous life, wealth, enjoyment and salvation).

D: Sir, what is **Artha?**

P: It is possession of gold, silver, house, lands, children, clothes, conveyances, radio, refrigerator and all such things which give us pleasure. Education, knowledge, gentlemanliness, modesty, tolerance and other good qualities are also possessions.

D: Sir, what is Kaama?

P: **Kaama** is getting pleasure; we get it not only in married life but in other ways also. We get happiness by looking at the beautiful scenes in nature, by hearing the lisping words of children, by lis-

tening to music and by helping poor people. When we satisfy our senses by experiencing things we get happiness.

Three kinds of pleasure are mentioned by Lord Krishna in **Bhagavad Gita** (XVIII - 37-39). "The pleasure which is like poison at first but like nectar at the end is said to be **Satvic** or good. It springs from the knowledge of the soul. (2) The pleasure which springs from the contact of senses with objects and which is like nectar at first but proves to be poison at the end is said to be **Rajasic** or passionate. (3) The pleasure which deludes the soul both at the beginning and at the end, and which arises from sleep, lethargy and error is said to be **Tamasic** or dull."

D: Sir, what is **Dharma?**

P: A charitable act is **Dharma.** Such prescribed duties as giving alms by the house-holder, administering justice by judges, piety and performance of rituals, and bravery of the soldiers are all dharma. Dharma is that which sustains a person by its observance and prevents one from going to hell. One should set apart from his earnings a portion for giving alms. One who helps others in need is said to be dearer to God than one who simply worships Him.

D: Is good character Dharma?

P: Yes. **Thirukural,** a code of ethics in Tamil by saint **Tiruvalluvar** embodies and inspires lofty principles. It says, "Dharma is to avoid jealousy, greed, anger and cruel words. **Dharma** is duty. A man should show his gratitude to his parents by performing Sraddha and offering alms on the anniversary of their death if they are no more. He

should worship God and honour his guests and his relatives.

Lord Krishna says, "Showing gratitude, love and tolerance are acts of Dharma. Alms given by those who expect no reward is good. The worship of God, of parents, of teachers and of the wise and observance of purity, uprightness, celibacy and non-violence are said to be the **penance of the body**".

"Sweet words which are truthful, pleasant and beneficial, and regular recitation of Vedas are said to be the **penance of speech.** Serenity of mind gentleness and self-control are said to be the **penance of the mind.** Gifts should be made to one who is too poor to return. They should be given at the proper time and place to a worthy person and with the feeling that it is one's duty to give" (B.C. XVII 14-20). A person must do his duty according to his Varna and Aasrama.

D: What is **Varna**, Sir?

P: Varna means colour, but here it means Class or Community. Our fore-fathers classified communities according to the work they undertook. The **Gita** says, "Control of internal and external sensations, austerity, purity, tolerance uprightness, knowledge, insight and devotion to God - these are the characteristics of a **Brahmin.**

Bravery resourcefulness, heroism in battles, generosity, majesty and control of others are the traits of a **Kshatriya**.

Farming, tending cattle and trading are the duties of a **Vysia**. The duty of a **Sudra** is to do service. The man who does his duty worships God" (B.G. XVIII - 42-44).

A family may have people doing all such duties impelled by their own nature. The classification

was according to work at first, but later on it was done according to birth in a family for reasons of training and efficiency. Whatever work is done it should be done well. That is Dharma. **No work is high or low.**

D: Besides the four classes, people speak of a fifth class called **Panchamas.**

P: The criminal tribes who were thieves professionally and who were accustomed to drinking toddy and eating beef were segregated. They lived apart from other communities. But at times there were saints born among them like **Nandanar** and **Thirupan Azhwar** who were honoured by other communities also.

We do not cut off a finger if there is a wound in it. We cure it. Similarly such backward people should be educated and brought forward to take part in the main stream of national activities. Gandhiji called them **Harijans** or children of God, and asked people to help them. "If the sinful man worships God and takes refuge in God, he soon becomes righteous and gets the highest state" (B.G. IX - 30 to 32). **Valmiki,** the author of the Ramayana was said to have been a bandit who later became a saint.

D: Sir, what is right and what is wrong?
Is there any golden rule to test this?

P: Westerners say that the act which does good to the largest number of people is good and that which brings harm to many is bad. But this rule is defective. The majority in a village may be drunkards. An act which seems to be good to many will be really bad. So we have to turn to **Gita** and **Dharma Sastras** where we can find the

solution. If, however, one is in doubt, one should refer to a worthy, competent teacher.

D: Sir, what is an **Aasrama?**

P: Four Aasramas or stages in life are mentioned in our Sastras, namely **Brahmachariya** or Bachelor's life, **Grihasta** or householder's life, **Vanaprasta** or retired life and **Sannyasa** or ascetic life. The bachelor gets education and character training from worthy teachers. Then he takes up a profession, earns and gets married. In the married life he has to perform certain duties and give alms. When he retires from his profession, he goes to his village and leads a retired, spiritual life. This is the third stage.

Some of these Vanaprastas abandon wife, children, property and desires, and take to Sannyasa or life of an ascetic. They attach themselves only to God. There are four kinds of Sannyasa, namely **Bahutaka, Kutisaka, Hamsa** and **Paramahamsa Parivrajaka**.

D: Sir, what qualities lead one to perfection?

P: **Purity, discipline, austerity, truth** and **non-violence** are the five essential qualities that lead one to perfection. One should be pure in mind, and body. Discipline includes control of mind, control of senses, duties, tolerance, modesty, humility, sacrifice, selflessness and freedom from conceit, wrath, greed and delusion. Austerity includes eating little, restraining of speech, body and mind, practice of meditation and concentration, and casting aside likes and dislikes. (B.G. XVIII - 51-53).

D: Sir, what is **Mukti?**

P: **Mukti** or Moksha is the release of the soul from the cycle of births and deaths and reaching God.

This is the final aim of all human beings. Saint **Nammalwar** says that if we cast away all desires except the love of God, we get release. Mukti is not achieved by the soul in one birth. It has to take several births. By virtuous deeds (**Karma**); by devotion to God (**Bhakti**), by right knowledge (**Jnana**) and surrender of self to God (**Prapatti**) one has to earn the grace of God for Mukti. For this one has to learn the nature of **Aatma** (soul) and the **several paths for salvation.**

7. WHAT IS AATMA?

Sir, what is Aatma?
When I ask,"Who did this?"you reply."I did it, sir".
This 'I' is Jivatma or individual soul in your body.
Paramatma or God is the soul of the Universe.
Can I say that the soul is the **body?**
No, body is perishable but soul is immortal. It exists even after the death of the body. We say "our bodies" and so the soul manifests itself different from the body.
Shall I say Aatma is **mind?**
No, mind is the function of the brain.
Is Aatma **knowledge** or intelligence?
No. Knowledge or intelligence assumes the character of an attribute which is capable of expansion and contraction. Knowledge reveals objects other than itself. It is not self-luminous. It may be infinite or finite. We say knowledge is produced in us and destroyed in us. So knowledge is different from soul. But knowledge is an essential attribute

of the soul and the soul possesses knowledge. The soul is the knower and the agent of experience, action and consciousness.

D: Sir, is Aatma **Prana** or life or **consciousness?**

P: Prana or life dies when the body dies but Aatma is immortal. Consciousness is an action of the brain.

D: What is the size of the soul, Sir?

P: The individual soul is said to be atomic in size.

D: Where is it in the body?

P: It is generally in the region of the heart. When we ask a child "Who did this?" it touches the chest and says, "I did it". Sandal paste in a room spreads its fragrance throughout the room. A lighted lamp in a room fills the room with its light. Similarly starting from the Aatma or soul in the heart, knowledge spreads and the soul experiences pleasure and pain all over the body.

D: What happens to the soul after the body dies?

P: When the soul leaves the body, it reaches heaven or hell according to the good or bad deeds in life. After experiencing pleasure in heaven (Swarga) or pain in the hell, it comes back to the earth again to enter a body.

Vasaamsi Jeernaani Yatha Vihaaya
Navaani Grihnaati Naroparaani,
Tatha Sareeraani Vihaya Jeernaan
Yanyaani Samyaati Navaani Dehi.
(B.G.II - 22)

Just as one casts off a worn-out cloth and wears a new one, so also the soul casts off the worn-out body and enters into another that is new .

After several births the soul by its righteous

deeds, devotion and knowledge gets release from the cycle of births and deaths and reaches God.

D: Sir, what is the nature of the **individual soul?**

P: It is different from the body, sense organs, mind, breath and discriminating faculty. It is the seat of intelligence, effort and consciousness. It is eternal. It is self-luminous and manifests itself of its own accord. It is atomic in size. It is not manifested by senses. It possesses knowledge. It cannot be cut by weapons, nor by fire, nor made wet by water,nor made dry by wind.(B.G. II - 20-25)

It is temporarily associated with sin and Karma. Souls are infinite in number, pure, unborn, eternal, imperishable and immutable.

D: What is the state of Aatma during dream, swoon and dreamless sleep, Sir?

P: The individual soul has three states -- the waking state (Jagrath), dream (swapna) and dreamless deep sleep (Sushupti). In the awakened state the soul experiences real things. In the dream, experiences of the past and the present mingle together haphazardly. It is said indication of warning is given in dreams. There is no appropriate time, place or cause in the dream state. The dream state is mere **illusion (Brahma Sutra 3.2.3)**.

In Sushupti or dreamless deep sleep, the individual soul goes to the Brahman (Higher self) in the Dahara Ahasa (small space) of the heart (Chaandogye Upanishad 6-8-1). So Brahman is the soul's place of rest in deep sleep. But it is still associated with ignorance or Avidhya. During Sushupti its intelligence is in a potential form. The self-same soul returns to consciousness after deep sleep and it says that it has enjoyed sound sleep.

In a **Swoon** the soul partially attains the state

of deep sleep and partially that of death. It experiences misery and pain as shown by the distorted face and limbs.

A fourth stage called **Turiya** is mentioned. In this state the soul is said to be in Samadhi or the last stage in **Raja yoga**. Only the breath and the soul remain in the body and consciousness disappears.

In the fifth state called **Turiya-adheedam** or **Nirvikalpa Samadhi** only the principle of Purusha or soul is said to remain in the body.

D: Is it not necessary to take proper **care of the body** and also take care that the food is pure?

P: Saint **Tirumoolar** says, "Finding God within my heart I am taking proper care of the body and consider it a temple where God resides"

Chandogya Upanishad says, "if the food is pure, **Antakarnas** like mind, and intelligence (Buddhi) become pure. This pure mind leads one to meditation on God and because of meditation our earthly bonds loosen.

Our Sastras prohibit eating of certain foods like garlic and onion as they foster Tamasic (dull) disposition. To some people our body is one to be decorated and smeared with scented powder. Some others make use of it to get the results of good and bad deeds. **To the devotees of God the body is a temple. It is Brahmapura.**

D: Sir, what is the essential difference between **Jivatma** and **Paramatma?**

P: I have already explained the nature of the individual soul. There is only one **Paramatma** or God. He is everywhere. He is also in the heart of everyone. He is not assailed by the three characteristics

of Satva, Rajas and Tamas and by Karma. He is beyond time and space. He is omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent.

Like the banyan tree which grows into a big tree from a small seed, He can be smaller than an atom and can become big enough to pervade every space of the universe. He is the external and internal ruler of all the sentient beings and nonsentient things. He possesses truth **(Satyam)**, knowledge (Jnanam), bliss and all auspicious qualities as mentioned in Chapter I.

God brings about creation, sustenance and destruction. He is the efficient and material cause of the universe. **Adi Sankara** considers Jivatma as the reflection of Paramatma in association with **Maya** and so he says there is only one Sat (existence) namely Paramatma and others are unreal.

D: Sir, what are the seven kinds of births?

P: In Hindu Sastras they are said to be living things in water, living things that creep, birds, animals, plants, men and angels.

D: Why is birth as human being said to be the best?

P: **Adi Sankara** says in **Viveka Choodamani** that it is rare to be born as a human being and that too without being blind, lame or deaf. This human birth is a rare opportunity to get divine knowledge and practise Bhakti and Jnana Yogas.

Animals and other living things have no discriminating intelligence. Man is called so because he has the discriminating **mind.** Even Devas or Celestial beings have to be born as human beings to get Moksha or freedom from the cycle of births and deaths.

D: Dear Sir, I have a doubt. Population is increasing in geometrical proportion. Are souls increasing in number?

P: Not at all. Animals and insects are decreasing, showing progress. They are being born as human beings.

8. THE SEVERAL PATHS FOR SALVATION

D: Sir, you were kind enough to teach me that Individual soul gets salvation or liberation from the cycle of birth and death after attainment of perfection at the end of several births. Kindly tell me the several ways by which one can get salvation.

P: They **are Karmayoga, Bhakti Yoga, Raja Yoga, Jnana Yoga and Prapatti.**

D: What is **Karma Yoga**, Sir?

P: There are several meanings for the word **Yoga**. It may mean path, sacrifice, luck, assembly, union, etc. Here Yoga means the union of the soul with God. It has the same meaning as the word 'Yoke'. Karma is work or act which produces some result. It is the cause for bringing a thing into existence.

Bhagavan says in Bhagavad Geeta, **"There are two kinds of men. Men of action require work and men of contemplation require knowledge.No man can ever be free from a life of action. No man can reach perfection merely by renunciation. Every man is driven to work by natural impulses. He who controls his mind and directs his organs of work without attachment to the result is superior to others" (B.G. III - 3-7).**

If we do good to somebody it is likely he may prove ungrateful and this causes pain to us. If we act without attachment, there will be no pain.

"It is by work alone that men like Janaka attained liberation. Great men should set up a standard. The enlightened man must do work for the maintenance of the world without attachment to the result of the work and with equanimity" (B.G. III - 19-21).

Whatever we do, we must do that as an offering to God. This outlook on work makes man free from corruption and negligence, and brings about social good. In B.G. X-21, Bhagavan says, "Among the Adityas I am Vishnu. Among the luminaries I am the Sun". What is meant here is that the best of everything is His manifestation. If we perform our duties to the best of our abilities and with perfection, the spark of divinity inherent in us will be manifested.

Karma Yoga is reaching God through work. A Karma Yogi works without attachment. He surrenders the fruits of work and the sense of agency to God.

Karmanyeva adhikarastay
maphaleshu, kadachana
ma karma phala-hetur bhoorma tay
sangostv akarmani.
(B.G. II - 47)

"Work alone you are entitled to and not to its fruit. Let not the desire for fruits be the motive for action. Also don't desist from work".

"Works of sacrifice, charity and penance should not be given up even by the sages as they have a

purifying effect" (B.G. XVIII - 5). They should be performed with the surrender of attachment and fruits. Then these acts will not bind one but will lead one to God.

D: Sir, is it possible ?

P: Everyone acts expecting some result. But we must surrender the fruits to God and do our duty without caring for success or failure to get salvation. It requires maturity of mind, equanimity and discipline (B.G. II - 49 - 51) God knows what to give. Perhaps He may give more than what we expect.

D: Sir, are Karmas classified?

P: Yes, they are (i) daily Karma (**NityaKarma**) (ii) Occasional Karma (**Nimithika Karma**) and (iii) Karma to fulfil one's desires (**Kaamya Karma**). Daily Karmas are obligatory. They are also called **Pancha Yagnas** or five duties. Worship of God is **Devayagna.** Offerings to Pitrs or forefathers to show gratitude is **Pitr Yagna**. Recitation of Mantras like Santhya Vandana is **Rishi Yagna**. Offering alms and helping those in distress is **Niru Yagna** or Manusha Yagna. Offering a part of the food to birds and domestic animals is **Bootha Yagna**. Occasional Karmas are like ceremonies for departed souls. Kaamiya Karmas are like performance of sacrifices for getting fine health, wealth and long life. Sudharsana Homa is performed for getting rid of any evil or misery.

D: A criminal who has murdered somebody escapes from the hand of justice with the help of a clever lawyer. Will not God punish him? What impels one to commit sin?

P: Everything happens according to the law of Karma This law can be explained by the proverb "As you

sow, so you reap". What we are now is the result of our past actions and thought in our previous life and what we may be in our future birth depends upon what we think and do now. For every action there is a reaction. **Everyone is the architect of one's own fortune.** If one does good, one gets good dividends. One has to suffer punishment for violation of moral codes.

Sins may be of thought, word and action. Kaama (sensuality and desire),**Krodha** (hatred and wrath) Loba (greed), Moha (lust and confusion), Mata (arrogance) and Macharya (envy) impel one to commit sin. They are the enemies to our progress. One should control them. God will punish the criminal in this life itself. When he escapes from the hand of justice for want of evidence, God will give him a low birth such as that of a dog or a pig in his next birth. The lawyer who helps the criminal knowingly will not also escape from punishment.

D: Are the happenings in our life predestined? If so, there will be no inclination to work for progress.

P: Karma is also classified thus:

(1) **Sanjita Karma** which is the sum total of Karmas awaiting results.

(2) **Prarapta Karma** for which results are given in this life and

(3) **Aagama Karma** for which results will be given in future births. Birth in a well - to - do family is the result of good Karmas (acts) in the previous life. The Law of Karma explains the inequalities in the lives of people. One being a genius cannot be explained by heredity, education or

environment alone, for instincts are the results of our past experiences or **Samskaras** obtained in our previous life. If we perform good deeds and make surrender of self to God, He will certainly lighten sufferings and help us. Even after death the soul is enclosed in a subtle body with subtle organs of perception, mind and energy.

D: Sir, what should be the work of a Karma Yogi?

P: The Karma Yoga has an action aspect and a thought aspect. When an act is being done, the doer should think that the acts are done by the body with the Gunas or dispositions. (2) He should ignore the fruits of action. (3) He must give up the idea "It is I - This is mine" in everything connected with the body. (4) He must surrender the fruits of action to God and regard success or failure with detachment.

D: Sir, what are the good deeds that are expected from us to get the grace of God?

P: After daily bath and wearing clean clothes, we should worship God with flowers, Tulsi leaves and a vessel of water. One may keep a garden for flowers and Tulsi leaves and offer them to temples. Feeding poor people, offering water to passers - by during summer, maintaining schools to teach Vedas, starting homes for orphans, old people, destitutes and widows, pilgrimage to holy places, study of Scriptures - these destroy evil Karmas.

BHAKTI YOGA

D: Sir, what is Bhakti Yoga?

P: It is the path for union with God through devotion. This method is suited to people of emotional nature.

D: Sir, what is Bhakti?

P: Bhakti is explained by sage **Narada** in one hundred

Sutras or aphorisms, **Sage Sandilya** has also composed 100 Sutras on Bhakti. 'Bhakti is intense love of God. It is the means by which one is enabled to get rid of the cycle of births and deaths and attain salvation'. (Narada Sutra 2-4)

In Bhagavatha Purana it is said that **Bhakta Prahalada** while thinking about God would laugh at sometime and weep at some other time. He would dance, shed tears of joy and fall down senseless over-come by emotion and devotion. Sri Chaitanya also behaved like that.

The love of **Gopis** for Sri Krishna was proverbial. A Gopi while selling curd was thinking so intensely about Krishna that instead of shouting 'curd for sale cried out "Govinda! Damodara!, Madhava!" (Krishna Karnamrudam - II - 55). She could never forget Him.

Among the means for attaining salvation Bhakti is the best because it is the result of the other means for salvation (N.Sutra 30). **Sage Vyasa** says, "Bhakti is that which makes a person take deep interest in the worship of God, recitation of scriptures and repetition of Mantras".

"Spiritual attainment which was got by meditation in the **Krita Yuga**, by Yagna in **Treta Yuga,** by worship in the **Dwapara Yuga** is got by singing songs in praise of God in this **Kali Yuga**" says sage **Parasara** in **Vishnu-purana** (6-2-17).

Sir, what should be the traits of a Bhakta?

A true Bhakta's traits are described in B.G. 12th chapter. "He will not harm anybody. He loves God beyond measure, recites his names, praises

His noble qualities and meditates on Him. He worships him with flowers, incense etc. He should be kind and compassionate, free from the feeling of 'I and mine' and look upon pleasure and pain alike. He must have forbearance and contentment. He must be self-restrained and firm in conviction. He must be free from fear and anger. He must be pure and selfless in his actions. He must regard blame and praise alike and should neither grieve nor desire"

"He must not hear stories of women, wealthy men and atheists" (Narada Sutra). "Bhakti transcends the three kinds of dispositions. It grows every moment. Even when one is engaged in worldly occupation for sustenance, one should be thinking of God" says Bhagavan Ramakrishna Paramahamsa.

"Birth as a man, desire for Mukti (Salvation) and getting into the association of Bhaktas are hard to attain" says **Adi Sankara** in Viveka Choodamani. **Narada** told sage **Vyasa** that he had become Deva Rishi because of his service to the devotees of God in his previous birth. (Bhagavada 1-5-6)

Swami Vivekananda says, "The world's great spiritual giants whom India has produced were steeped in rich mythology and rituals. You may regard them as superstitious. But I do not consider myself worthy even to sit at their feet".

No one should entertain thoughts of supremacy and feel proud about his intensity of Bhakti or strict observance of the codes of religion and ethics. Humility must be the hallmark of a true Bhakta. **Bali** exhibited his arrogance when he offered to give anything desired by Lord Vamana and his ego became greater when he was asked for land for

three steps. He was rid of this ego by Lord Vamana and was blessed.

D: Is Bhakti of several kinds, Sir?

P: Sage Narada says that Gowri Bhakti of lower type is of three kinds (Sutra 56). The worship by an angry man impelled by jealousy, pride and violence is **Tamasic Bhakti**. The worship of a man desiring wealth, praise and pleasure is **Rajasic Bhakti**. The desire of a man for getting rid of his sins or the feeling that it is his duty to please and praise God is **Satvic Bhakti.**

The devotees may also be classified thus

i. **Aarthas** are suffering people like Kunti, Droupathy and Parikshit.

ii. **Arthartis** are those desiring help, wealth and position like Sugriva or Dhruva.

iii. **Jijjnasus** are those desiring knowledge of Brahmam.

iv. **Jnanis** are those devotees full of knowledge. The Jnani is superior to others (B.G. VII - 16 to 19)

In Bahia Bhakti the devotee thinks that God is in a temple and goes there to worship. In **Ananya Bhakti** the favourite form of God is worshipped. For **Anthara Bhakti**, knowledge, yoga practice, asecticism and meditation are required. For this anyone of the thirty two Upasanas mentioned in the Upanishads, like **Dahara Vidhya** and **Sandilya Vidhya** will be useful. In **Para Bhakti** the devotee longs to see and this leads to His being seen by His grace. In **Parama Bhakti** the devotee has a strong desire to be ever with Him and enjoy in His service.

D: Sir, are there different ways of showing Bhakti?

P: **Ramananda, Chaitanya, Tulasi Das, Guru**

Nanak, Thiagaraja and Purandhara Dasa showed their Bhakti by singing and dancing. **Bhakti Vedanta Swamy's** disciples in '**Hare Krishna** movement' show such Bhakti. **Kusela** showed his devotion as a friend to Lord Krishna, Hanuman as a servant to **Lord Rama**, Yasoda as a mother to Lord Krishna, and **Andal** as a lover to **Lord Ranganatha. Narada, Vyasa** and **Suka** showed their devotion by composing and singing songs about Him.

Prahalada speaks of **Nine ways** of showing devotion to God (**Bhagavatha Purana** 7-5-23).

Sravanam, Keerthanam Vishno
Smaranam, Pada sevanam,
Archanam, Vandanam, Dasyam,
Sakyam, Atma Nivedanam.

King Parikshit by listening to stories about Him, Suka by singing songs of His stories, Prahalada by meditation on God, **Lakshmi** by her service to Him at His feet, **Bhrigu** by his worship, **Akrura** by his obeisance to Lord Krishna, **Hanuman** by his service to Lord Rama, **Arjuna** by his friendship to Lord Krishna, and Bali by surrender of everything he had and his self to Lord Vamana showed their devotion and attained the highest status.

There are also other ways of showing Bhakti. In **Marjaara Kisora** method the kitten surrenders itself to its mother, which by holding it in its mouth takes it to a safe place. In a like manner, the devotee feeling helpless surrenders himself totally to God.

The second method is **Markata Kisora** method. When a monkey jumps from one branch to another, its young one clings to her by putting its hands round her waist. Instead of expecting the Lord to help him the devotee gets hold of the Lord, as it were, by his devotion as decribed by Saint Manikavachagar in his psalm.

The third method is to pray to God to act like the keeper of a monkey who controls it and asks it to dance. Adi Sankara in his **Sivananda Lahiri** prays to God to control his mind and make him show devotion as he is unable to make self-surrender or cling to Him.

Sir, what are the impediments or obstacles that may stand in the way of a devotee's progress?

They are not poverty, diappointment, disease and grief. In fact, some of these may serve as incentives to love the Lord. Desire for wealth, pride, jealousy, lack of forbearance, too much attachment to family, want of humility and too much sleep, food and work may stand in his way to progress.

Sir, why should not God get rid of the miseries of his devotees?

Saint Bhadrachala Ramadas had to go to prison and saint Thyagaraja suffered from poverty. "A gold piece when put into fire gets purified. Similarly a devotee's love of God becomes all the more intense by his misery" says sage **Thiruvalluvar.** Kunti said to Lord Krishna, " Only when I am in distress I am able to get your presence and help. So I wish I may get into miseries often" (Bhagavatha 1.8.25). If God gives His devotee wealth, it is likely he may forget Him. The misery

is given to him as a result of his past Karma. Further God wants him to experience and exhaust the result of all his evil Karmas of his past life in this life itself so that he may be fit to enter into the kingdom of God. **One is the architect of one's own fortune or misfortune.**

Kulasekara Alwar says in one of his psalms "Just like a patient who bears the pain during the operation of a wound by a surgeon, I will put up with the miseries given by God, for they will be only for my good".

D: Sir, of the two paths - the path of deep devotion looking upon God as a supreme person or looking upon God as the impersonal absolute - which is better?

P: The second path is very difficult for ordinary people with body consciousness. In this path one has to depend on his own efforts. In the first path the devotee depends on God and God is ready to help him out of his ocean of mercy. **Bhagavatha Purana** compares Bhakti to a morsel of food eaten. The food appeases hunger, gives good taste and also strength to the body. Similarly Bhakti confers renunciation, bliss and knowledge at the same time. "We cannot pray to an impersonal God" said Adi Sankara, "We cannot pray to Nirguna Brahmam but only to Saguna Brahmam". So he composed hymns showing his devotion to Vishnu, Siva, Lakshmi, Ambika and Narasimha.

RAJA YOGA

D: Sir, I have read that Rishis' had performed Tapas and attained power and also salvation. What is Tapas?

P: It is **Raja Yoga** which is the psychological method

of union with God. This Yoga helps us to concentrate powers of mind, bring them to a focus and throw them on to subjects. Truths are revealed. When we try to concentrate our mind on a subject, several unconnected thoughts rush into the mind and disturb it. Raja Yoga teaches us how to control the mind and increase its powers.

The mind has the reflective power of looking back into its own depth and reveal the truth and knowledge. The Yogi tries to get this reflective power. **Sage Patanjali** has dealt with this subject of Raja Yoga in four chapters and explained in aphorisons (Sutras) how to control the mind and get wonderful powers. **Swami Vivekananda** has published a commentary on it in English and this has been translated into Tamil by me.

D: Sir, kindly tell me about this Raja Yoga.

P: The practice of Raja Yoga takes a long time. A part of this practice is physical. But it is mainly mental. It says that the person who knows how to control and manipulate the finer internal forces of the mind can control the grosser external forces of nature in the universe.

"Yama, Niyama, Aasana,
Pranayama, Prathyahara,
Dharana, Dhyana and Samadhi
are eight limbs of yoga".

says sage **Patanjali (Yoga Sastras Ch.II - 29)**

1. Yama: (1) Non-killing, (2) truthfulness, (3) non-stealing, (4) Brahmacharya (Celibacy) and (5) non-receiving of gifts constitute Yama. These are to be practised first.

2. **Niyama:** (1) Internal and external cleanliness, (2) contentment, (3) austerity (Tapas), (4) study of religious scriptures and (5) worship with self-surrender to God constitute Niyama or codes of conduct for observance. For internal purity one should avoid falsehood, violence anger, avarice and jealousy. The result is cheerfulness of mind, concentration, control of senses and fitness for realising God. By repetition of Mantra the vision of the worshipped deity is realised.

3. **Aasana :** This is posture which is firm and pleasant. The Hata Yoga mentions a number of Aasanas for curing diseases and for the fitness and well-being of the body. They are Sirasasana, Padmasana, Sarvangasana and others. For Yoga Padmasana or lotus posture is convenient. Sulabaasana or ordinary squating may also be used.

4. **Pranayama :** This is controlled breath which consists of inhalation (**Pooraka**), retention (**Kumbhaka**) and exhalation (**Rechaka**). These three processes may take thirty six seconds each. Three Gayathri mantras with some addition are to be recited for one Pranayama. Prana or vital force is then controlled.

5. **Prathyahara :** This is bringing the organs of the senses under the control of the will. By nature, the senses are acting outwards and are coming in contact with the external objects.. They are to be controlled and turned inwards.

6. **Dharana :** This is holding the mind centred on to some particular object. Any of the 32 Vidhyas or suggestions for concentration and meditation, such as Dahara Vidhya mentioned in the Upanishads may be adopted. The mind is made to concentrate on the small space in the lotus-shaped heart and

imagine within it a small flame of the soul and in it the Cosmic Soul or God. The mind may also concentrate on the centre of the brain, on the middle of the forehead, or on the right eye.

7. **Dhyana :** This is meditation. A particular kind of mental waves arise and become prominent. Finally one wave of thought alone is left and it flows in a continuous stream.

8. **Samadhi** : This is the state of transcendental beautitude or meditation. There is complete detachment from worldly surroundings. The whole mind becomes one wave and unites with God, the object of meditation. If the mind is fixed on the centre for twelve seconds, it will be Dharana. Twelve such Dharanas make one Dhyana, and twelve such Dhyanas make one Samadhi. One who has attained the **Samadhi** or the **superconscious** state can attain eight Siddhis or wonderful powers as the following :-

1. **Anima** is the ability to shrink in size to that of an atom.
2. **Mahima** is the ability to increase in size as desired.
3. **Garima** is the ability to become extremely heavy.
4. **Lagima** is the ability to be extremely light.
5. **Prapti** is the ability to bring anything within reach. Knowledge of the past and also of the future is known.
6. **Prakamiya** is the realization of any desire to go to any place or get any object.
7. **Eesitva** is to become the leader with authority.
8. **Vasitva** is to bring under control anything animate or inanimate.

If Dharana, Dhyana and Samadhi are combined, Samyama results. When **Samyama** is centred on an object, that object can be attained.

A **Mumukshu** is one who desires salvation or Mukti. He will not use these Siddhis or occult powers as he will be lost in them and his spiritual progress will be blocked.

A **Yogi** should try to concentrate his mind in solitude. He should resort to a lonely secret place free from disturbances, subdue his mind and senses, and get rid of his desires and possessions. He should sit erect, gaze on the tip of his nose and meditate on God. (B.G. VI - 11 to 14)

He should be temperate in sleep and food. Supreme happiness comes to a Yogi whose mind is at rest, whose passions are composed and whose mind rests on God. He sees HIM everywhere and sees everything in HIM. (B.G. VI - 27,30)

D: Sir, the mind is fickle, powerful and obstinate. How can I control it?

P: The mind is fickle and hard to curb. As a lamp in a place sheltered from the wind does not flicker, the light of Jnana in the lamp of Atma should not be disturbed by the mind which is like a wind (B.G. VI - 19). **Our body is like a chariot; the Aatma is the traveller. Buddhi, the discriminating faculty, is the charioteer; it should control the senses (which are like horses) with the help of the mind which is like a bridle. (Katopanishad 3-4 and 3-9)**

Suppressing the thoughts may result in their coming up with a force. The thought of anger must be sublimated by entertaining the feeling of love. The energy in the **Kundalini** must be raised to the brain. **Only constant practice will help one to**

control the wavering mind. Namajapa or repetition of favourite God's name will help one to concentrate. "**When there is difficulty, surrender to me**" said Lord Krishna to Arjuna.

D: Sir, what is **Kundalini**?

P: Within the backbone is the spinal cord. The nerve fluid flows in the nerves in the central cavity of the spinal cord, and in the brain. The bottom portion of the backbone is called **Sacrum**. The base of the spinal cord is called **Muladhara** where the nerve power is coiled up like a snake. This power is called **Kundalini**. The aim of Pranayama is to raise this coiled power and send it to the brain through the **Sushumna canal** in the spinal cord. In the brain the energy is said to be stored in the **Pineal** endocrine gland as **Ojas.** This Kundalini energy enables the Yogi to get the hidden knowledge. The Yogi converts the sexual energy into ojas, the inner force.

D: Sir, what may be the fate of a man whose mind has fallen away from Yoga owing to lack of steadfastness?

P: It is difficult to be steadfast in Yoga. Disease, mental laziness, doubt, sense enjoyment and grief assail him. Only practice makes one perfect (**Patanjali's Yogasastra**) (I - 30 to 33).

A man who does good never comes to grief. On his death, his soul goes to **Swarga** (paradise), the region of virtuous souls and after some years he is reborn in this world in a good and prosperous family. Or **he is reborn in a family of men full of wisdom and spirituality and he will strive still further for perfection (B.G. VI** - 40 to 43)

JNANA YOGA

D: Sir, what is Jnana Yoga?

P: This is union with God through the means of knowledge. If the aspirant for salvation is philosophically minded he thinks about the real nature of the soul and that of God and the relation between them. He has to know that the body is destroyable and experiences pleasure and pain.

"A **Jnani** is one who has attained real knowledge (Jnanam). He does not think that the body is the' I'. Nor does the think 'This is mine'. He is not attached to wife, children and property. He should have modesty, sincerity, non-violence, forbearance, uprightness, cleanliness and self-control. He should be devoted to God through constant meditation. He should see God abiding in all beings, in himself and in the space outside".
(B.G.XIII - 7 to 11,27).

A Jnani burns up the result of his past Karma (B.G.IV - 37) and becomes fit for salvation. A Jnani is free from lust and anger and is actively engaged in promoting the welfare of all beings (B.G. V - 25 - 26). He controls speech, body and mind and takes only Satvic, minimum food.
(B.G. XVIII - 52).

"Who is perfectly poised in mind, who is not deluded by illusions, who is not bewitched by pairs that spring from love and hate, who renounces the fruits of his actions, who is alike to friend and foe, pleasure and pain and transcends the three dispositions of nature becomes a Jnani".
(B.G. XII 13 to 19)

D: The Acharyas say that belief in their philosophy or **Siddhanta** is only real knowledge.

P: Siddhantas differ. **Bhagavan Ramakrishna** said, "One need not lose himself or herself in the hair - splitting Siddhantas. Souls and Universe belong to God. He is in all beings and all beings are in Him".

D: Sir, what are the qualities necessary for spiritual progress?

P: One must have ethical excellence and cultivate virtues like non-violence, truthfulness and purity. **Adi Sankara** mentions **four disciplines** or **Sadhanas Chatushtyam** for spiritual progress. (1) **Viveka** or discriminating intellect to find out the real from the unreal. (2) **Vairagia** or detachment from the unreal earthly pleasures (3) The six treasures of Wisdom:

(a) **Chama** is control of mind to concentrate on our aim.

(b) **Dama** is control of senses to keep them inactive.

(c) **Uparati** is control of mind from outside objects.

(d) **Titiksha** is bearing miseries without trying to get rid of them.

(e) **Chraddha** is faith in the teaching of Vedas and the Guru.

(f) **Samadhana** is to get the mind fixed on Brahmam.

(4) **Mumukshutvam** is desire to get salvation.

D: Sir, is intellect different from knowledge?

P: Yes. (1) Jnana or Real Knowledge is higher than intellect. (2) Intellect knows the things of the world. Jnana is the fulfilment of intellect. (3) Intellect deals with parts and gives only partial or relative truth. Jnana deals with the whole and gives the absolute truth. (4) Intellect only apprehends, whereas Jnana reveals. (5) Intellect is

confined to time and place. Jñana is not so confined. (6) Intellect is the instrument to get knowledge. Knowledge is obtained by constant meditation, deep devotion and discussion about the nature of God, soul and universe with saintly scholars.

PRAPATTI

D: Sir, what is meant by surrender of self to God?

P: This is also known as **Prapatti, Paranyasa, Charanagati,** and **Parasamarpana.** A weak man who is unable to carry out some work approaches a competent man, takes refuge in him and requests him to help achieve his desire. A man of devotion may not be able to remember God at the time of his death because of the condition of his mind and body. Even when they have sound health, men known for their devotion and knowledge directly make an absolute surrender of self to God. This is known as **Sva-nishta.**

Prapatti is done as a ceremony. The Acharya (religious preceptor) takes his disciple to the idol of God, teaches him the Prapatti Mantras and asks him to pray for God's grace. This kind of Prapatti is known as **Ukti-nishta**. When the Acharya prays to God offering Prapatti on behalf of a devotee it is called **Bhagavata Nishta.**

Kulasekara Azhwar in one of his psalms says, "Oh Krishna! When I am on death-bed, I may not remember you. So, I offer my self-surrender to you even now. Let my mind be always thinking about your feet".

Lord Krihna says in Gita (XVIII - 66)

**Sarva dharman parityajya mamekam
charanam viraja
aham tva sarva papebhio moksha
ishyami ma suchah.**

This is taken as Prapatti Mantra. This Mantra means: Surrendering all dependence and attachment to all duties and to the fruits of work come to me alone for refuge. I will release you from all sins and give you salvation. Do not worry"

We may not be able to do Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga and Jnana Yoga satisfactorily. Practising them to the best of our ability we must do Prapatti. We should never give up charity, Tapas and prescribed daily Karmas. But we should do them to please God and without attachment to the fruits thereof and without the sense 'I am doing it . We should feel "God makes us do the work and gets pleasure out of it".

In Valmiki Ramayana Bhagavan Rama says (6-18-33):

**"Sakrudeva prapannaya
tavasmeeticha yachatay
abhaym sarva bhootheybio
dadaam yetad vratam mama"**

This means, '**If any one surrenders his self to me and seeks protection, I protect him from all dangers and creatures. This is my vow"**

D: Are we to observe any rule in doing Prapatti?

P: A man engaged in offering Prapatti must engage himself in virtuous deeds; he should help the devotees of God, love all, speak sweetly, and observe non-violence. These are favourable to Prapatti and are called **Anukoolya Sankalpam.**

2. He desists from doing things contrary to the

above. He should not leave daily Karmas and should not eat forbidden food. This is called **Pratikoolya Varjana.**

3. He should have implicit faith in God that He would not fail to protect him. This is called **Mahavisvasa.**

4. He should repent for his sins and appeal to God to forgive him.

5. He should feel sorry that he is unable to carry out his duties with total detachment and show devotion fully with body, mind and speech.

6. He should surrender his soul to Him to be taken care of. **Sri Nikamanta Desikan** has dealt with this subject of Prapatti fully in his works.

"Ananyaas chintayantey maam
yay janaah paryupaasatay
Teshaam nityaabhiyukthaanaam
yogakshemam vahaam yaham"
(B.G. IX - 22)

This means : **"Whoever is fully devoted to me and worships me alone, I will surely provide him or her with all the worldly needs and also salvation".**

The devotee should also learn **Arthapanchaka.**

D: What is **Arthapanchaka**, Sir?

P: The devotee should learn:

i. The nature of God.
ii. The nature of Jiva.
iii. The means by which the soul can get salvation.
iv. The benefit of reaching Him and
v. The impediments that block his progress - namely anger, desire, the feeling of I and Mine

enjoying the pleasures of the sense organs, engaging in acts which are forbidden, and thinking that success is due to one s own efforts alone.

D: Sir, of the two - Jnana Yoga and Bhakti Yoga - which is the better means of achieving salvation?

P: It is foolish to think that we can do any one Yoga separately. All these paths are to be tried. **Rajaji** says, **"The way of devotion is not different from the way of knowledge. When intelligence matures and lodges securely in the mind, it becomes wisdom - When wisdom is integrated in life and issues into action, it becomes Bhakti. If it is not transformed into Bhakti, such knowledge is useless tinsel".**

Acharya Ramanuja in his **Sri Bhashya** says, "Bhakti is loving contemplation of God. It is a continuing process and is promoted by :
1. Discrimination (**Viveka**), 2. detachment (**Vimoka**), 3. Practice of meditation (**Abhyasa**), 4. Performance of the five great sacrifices (**Pancha Yagnas**) and practising non- violence. **The final liberation which is after death is due to the constant communion with God, which is a consummation of Karma, Jnana, Bhakti and Prapatti.**

Acharya Sankara in **Viveka Choodamani** says: "One should hear (**Sravanam**) from a competent teacher explanation of Upanishads etc., understand and reflect in mind (**Mananam**), fix it in mind (**Nithyasanam**) and then meditate (**Nishtai**)

For a Jnani Paandithiam (Proficiency in knowledge), **Balaswabam** (Child-like qualities, not ignorance but freedom from vice, anger etc.), **Mounam** (reflection) and continued **Dhyanam** (meditation) are required (**Brahma Sutra 3-4-47**).

9. HINDU SIDDHANTAS.

D: Sir, you mentioned that Advaita is a Siddhanta. What are Siddhantas ?

P: The latter portion of Vedas consists of philosophical truths and is called the end of the Vedas **or Vedanta**. It is alsc called **Upanishads**. The Upanishads contain seemingly contradictory statements about Brahmam. Sages have thought over them and have given their **final opinions**. These are called **Siddhantas.** There are three main Siddhantas - **Advaita, Dvaita** and **Visishtadvaita**. The Siddhantists quote statements from the Upanishads in support of their Siddhanta.

D: Sir, please explain the Advaita Siddhanta.

P: **Advaita** means 'one without a second'. It means that only one Self exists and that is **Brahmam.** The individual soul has no real existence. Just as we see reflections of the sun in several ponds of water, so also the souls are only the reflections of God. The universe and the souls are the apparent manifestations of God. God is the apparent material cause of this universe. A rope in partial darkness appears like a snake. The idea of a snake is super - imposed on the rope. The changes are called **Vivarthavada.** They are apparent. They are due to space, time causation, name and forms. When the delusion ceases, the snake also disappears. When one sees God, the universe vanishes for him.

Ignorance or Maya is the cause of this delusion. Maya has neither existence nor non-existence. It is not God. It produces delusion and is a mystery. It is beyond definition. The world is not real. It is like mirage. When one understands this, one's ignorance disappears and Jivan Mukti is attained.

When this soul is finally released from the body, Videha Mukti (release from the body and salvation) is attained by the soul. The apparent individual soul unites with the Cosmic Soul or God. Only **Nirguna Brahmam** (God without attributes) is real. **Saguna Brahmam** or Iswar is God with auspicious attributes. This results when Brahmam is associated with **Maya.** Yet, Sankara composed songs praising **Ganapathi, Siva, Vishnu, Kumara, Sakti** (Ambal) and **Soorya** and asked his followers to worship them to get Bhakti.

This Siddhanta was expounded by Shri **Goudapada** who lived in Badrinath in the 8th Century A.D. **Adi Sankara**, who lived in the later part of the 8th century learnt this Siddhanta from Govindapada, the disciple of **Goudapada**.

Adi Sankara quoted the following statements (MahaVakias in the Upanishads in support of his Advaita:

"Aham Brahmam Asmi" - I am Brahmam
(Brihadaranyaka Upan. 1 - 4 - 10)

"Tat Tvam Asi" - That thou art
(Chaandokya Upan. 6 - 6 - 3)

"Ayam Aatma Brahma" - The soul is Brahmam
(Brihada. Upan. 2 - 5 - 19)

The theory of Superimposition was accepted only by Adi Sankara and the Bauddhas.

D: What is Visishtadvaita, Sir ?

P: It is the doctrine of qualified monism. Sri Ramanuja the exponent of this doctrine says that it has its support in the Upanishads and was nourished by Bodhayana of the 6th century B.C. and later by **Tanka, Dramida, Guhadeva, Alwars, Nathamuni** and **Yamunacharia.** Some of them lived even before Adi Sankara.

Ramanuja says that he only followed the doctrine expounded by them.

This Siddhanta accepts three principles : 1. Sentient beings (individual souls). 2. Non- sentient things (matter). 3. God. All these are real. Matter and souls form God's body. God is the Soul of souls and of the universe.These three realities differ from one another, but souls and universe are dependent on God.

Surrounding the seed in the mango fruit are the fleshy part and skin which are attributes of the seed, if the seed is considered as the substantive part. Yet, we call the whole thing as mango. Similarly, God has the universe and souls as His body or attributes (Viseshanas). Whatever exists is within God. This doctrine accepts no second independent principle apart from God. So this Siddhanta is called Visishtadvaita or qualified monism.

Ramanuja says (**Jada**) matter includes nature (**Prakriti**) and time. Non - matter (**Ajada**) includes attributive consciousness (**Dharmabhutha Jnana**), God, souls and Suddha Satva. **Nityavibhuti,** the abode of God, is **Suddhasatva.** Time is the cause of change. It has parts like years, months, days and hours.

When the souls attain salvation by exhausting Karmas in this world, they go through **Devayana** (Lighted Path) to God and enjoy His presence. **The released soul (Mukta) gets all attributes and powers of God except the powers of creation, sustenance and dissolution.** (Brahmasutras IV - 4 - 17)

In Katopanishad it is said (5 - 13)

**"Nityo Nityaanaam Chetana Chetanaanaam
Eko Bahunaam Yo Vidaati Kaamaan"**

Iswara (God) and Jiva (Souls) are intelligent beings. But Iswara is single and souls are infinite. Iswara fulfils the desires of His devotees.

In **Mundaka Upanishad** a parable is mentioned (3 - 1 - 1). Of the two birds sitting on a pipal tree, one eats the fruits, sweet and bitter, and experiences pleasure and pain, while the other bird with a golden hue without doing anything witnesses the former. The tree is our body. One bird is our soul; the other bird is God.

In **Brihadaranyaka Upanishad it is said: (3 - 7 - 3 & 3 - 7 - 15) "He who is in Jivatma** (individual soul) **controls it, and has souls and universe as His body, is your Aatma and Antaryamin (indweller)".**

So God is the Soul of souls. "Tat Tvam Asi" according to Sri Ramanuja means, "You have God as indweller" but Advaitins mean "Thou art That".

D: Sir, what is Prakriti?

P: It is primordial nature. It is also called **Pratana. Sage Kapila** explains this in **Samkya Darsana.** Prakriti is material nature. It gives rise to Mahat (Buddhi or intellect) by which the soul cognises the external world. Out of Mahat arises Ahankara which is responsible for our sense of **Egoism.** Out of Satvic Ahankara are evolved the **Anthakarnas** or the inner organs of **mind, intellect, egoism and mind-stuff** (Chitha). Out of Rajasa Guna Ahankara are evolved the five organs of action and knowledge.

The organs of action (**Karmendriyas**) are mouth, hands, legs, anus and the sex organ. The five organs of knowledge (**Jnanendriyas**) are ears, eyes, tongue, nose and skin. Out of Tamasa Ahankara are evolved the five **Tanmatras** (subtle essences) of the five

elements, sound, touch, light, taste and smell. The five great elements (**Pancha Bhutas**) are Akasa (ether), Vayu (air), Tejas (light or fire) ap (water) and Prithvi (earth).

So Prakriti, Mahat, Ahankara, Mind, Karmendriyas, Jnandriyas, Tanmatras, Panchabutas - all these constitute 24 principles. The soul which is independent of Prakriti is the 25th principle. **Brahmam** is the 26th principle. The world is evolved out of the five great elements - Panchabhutas. The Brahmam is the **efficient** as well as the **material** cause of the universe. (Tait. Upanishad 3 - 1 and 2 - 7) Prakriti is the hidden Sakti (energy) of God and is called Maya. It is ever changing but God can control it.

D: Sir, are Jivas classified?

P: Vaishnavas classify Jivas thus:
(1) The **Baddhas** (the bound), (2) the Muktas (the released) and (3) the **Nityas** (the permanently released souls) who are a few like Adisesha, Garuda and Vishvaksena and are always by the side of Lord Vishnu for His service.

D: Are there stages in the state of salvation?

P: **Mumukshu** is one who intensely aspires for Mukti. **Sayujya** is said to be the highest stage as the souls' enjoyment along with God is said to be entire. The other stages in Mukti are said to be **Salokya, Sameebia** and **Saroopia. Devayana** is the lighted path of God which the released souls take towards God.

D: Sir, are there forms in which God manifests Himself?

P: According to Ramanuja, God manifests Himself in 5 forms. In the highest form, the Muktas and Nityas are around **Parabrahmam** or **Lord Narayana** in Vaikunta and enjoy themselves in His service.

The second form of manifestation as **Viuha** is four-fold. They are **Vasudeva, Sankarshana, Pradyumna** and **Aniruddha.** As Vasudeva, He is in Yoga slumber, lying on the ocean of milk and resting Himself on **Adisesha**. From here he is said to respond to the call of His devotees for help. The form of Sankarshana is for destruction; the form of Pradyumna is for creation and the form of Aniruddha is for protection.

The third Viuha is **Vibhava** in which God manifests Himself as Avatars like Rama and Krishna. The fourth **Viuha** is **Antaryamin** by which he dwells in the hearts of all embodied beings to guide them. The fifth is **Archa** form in which God remains in consecrated idols for the worship of His devotees. The idol can be made of stone, wood, gold, silver or alloy of the five metals (Panchaloka).

Saligrama is a kind of stone, round and black or brown. It is obtained in the river **Gantaki** in Nepal. It is a Pratika or emblem. Yogis meditate on the Dahara Akasa or small space in the heart where they believe that God remains.

D: Sir, what are Pancha Samskaras, Pancharatra and Vykanasa?

P: The Vaishnavas are enjoined to perform five duties. The **Panchasamskaras** are these :

1. To have the impression of Sanku (conch) and Chakra (Sudarsana wheel) on their shoulders.
2. To wear Naamam or Pundaram.
3. To perform worship of God daily.
4. To do Mantratraya Japa daily and
5. To have Dasyanaama.

Vykanasa is the Aagama rule explained by Sage **Vikanasa** for the worship of Vishnu. **Pancharatra** is another Aagama rule for worship. It is so called because it was revealed to five sages in five nights. It is so called also for the following reasons:

1. God manifests Himself in five forms or **Viuhas;**
2. He is requested to be present in five objects for worship - Sthandula (rice), Mandala (place), Kumba (pot), Pushpa (flower) and Vigraha (idol);
3. The devotees observe Panchasamskara.
4. They worship five times a day. There are 5 kinds of worship - Abigama, Upadana, Ijyai, Swatyaya and Yoga.

D: Sir, what is **Rahasyathraya?**

P: These are the three secret Mantras for the worship of Vishnu. The first is **Ashtakshara** of eight syllables - **Om Namo Narayanaya.** This means "I worship Lord Narayana who is the Soul of souls and of the Universe". The Dvaya Mantra consists of 2 lines:-

"Sriman Narayana Charanow Charanam Prapatiyay Srimathey Narayanaya Namah"

This means with the grace of Goddess Lakshmi Devi (the consort of Narayana) I take refuge in the feet of Lord Narayana. Let me have the benefit of serving them both. The third Mantra is Charama Sloka (B.G.XVIII. - 66) which has already been explained in Prapatti. **Sriman Nikamanta Desikan** has explained these Mantras in detail in his works.

D: Sir, what are the essential differences between Advaita and Visishtadvaita?

P: 1. Ramanuja says there is only Saguna Brahmam with auspicious qualities. But Sankara speaks of two kinds of Brahmam and says that the Saguna Brahmam for worship is associated with Maya or ignorance.

2. Ramanuja says that the universe forms the body of God and it is real. Sankara says that the world is unreal and it is like a mirage.

3. Ramanuja says that the Jivatmas and universe form the body of God and that God is the Soul of souls. Sankara says that the individual soul is only a reflection of the Brahmam and on getting salvation, it unites absolutely with Brahmam.

4. Ramanuja says that Karma and Jnana are means to Bhakti by which one attains salvation. Sankara says that Karma and Bhakti lead to Jnana which only helps one to get salvation.

D: Sir, what is Dvaita? Who explained it first?

P: Dvaita was explained by **Aananta Theertha** who was also called **Madhavacharya**. He lived

in the 13th century A.D. He said that Jivatma has a separate existence from the Brahmam even in the Mukti stage, and the relation between them is that of a master and a servant. He mentioned five differences:

1. Difference between the individual soul and God.
2. Difference between matter and God.
3. Difference between soul and matter.
4. Difference among the souls.
5. Difference among the various kinds of matter.

He said that souls and universe have separate existence though they depend on God. He said, that by worshipping Lord Krishna, it will be easy to get salvation.

D: Sir, Dvaita and Visishtadvaita seem alike. What are the differences between them?

P: In both these Siddhantas Lord Narayana is the Supreme God. Only He has the power to grant salvation. The Advaitins also accept this point.

1. Ramanuja said that the universe and souls form the body of God. In Dvaita, these are separate entities and the individual soul is not an **Amsa** (part) of God.

2. In Dvaita, the individual souls are differentiated as males and females even in Mukti stage. In Visishtadvaita there is no such difference.

3. In Dvaita, God is only the efficient cause and not the material cause.

4. The Dvaita has not said anything about Prapatti.

D: Sir, what is Saiva Siddhanta?

P: It is almost Visishtadvaita. But it accepts Siva alone as Supreme God. What is in a name? Vishnu also has the name Siva among His thousand names. They have also the three separate entities - God, souls and the universe. They have separate existence. Siva, without parting from His Consort, Sakti (Parvati) is present everywhere. In Saivaism, rude sects like Kalamukhas, Bairavas and Paasupatas have disappeared. But the rude practice of Kalamukhas wearing a string of skulls or holding a skull in hand and dancing exists in some parts of Bengal.

Sambandar, Appar, Manicka vachagar and **Sundarar** who are called Saiva Acharyas and Santhana Acharyas like **Meikanda Thevar, Arulnandi Sivam** and **Umapathi Sivam** were responsible for the development of Saiva Siddhanta. They carried on a tirade against Jainism and Buddhism in South India. **Sivajnana Botham** was written by **Meikanda Thevar** and **Sivarprakasam** by **Umapati Sivam. Nilakanta Sivachariar** wrote a commentary on Brahma Sutras in the 11th century A.D.

God has **Sat** (existence) **Chit** (Knowledge and **Aanandam** (Bliss). He is **Pati** or master and the souls are called **Pasu** who are bound by **Paasam** or ignorance. Paasam is of three kinds. They are **Aanavam** or Egoism, **Karmam** or past actions and Maya. Aanavam gives the feeling of 'I and mine' and is responsible for actions. Karmas give pleasure or pain according to good or bad deeds. The ego feeling and Kanma (Karma) are due to everchanging Maya or

Nature. It is Maya that gives the soul body, sense organs etc. for enjoyment. Maya is under the control of God.

There are four paths for salvation.

1. Charya (Karma Yoga)
2. Kiriya (Bhakti Yoga)
3. Raja Yoga
4. Jnana Yoga

One should understand the relationship among Pati, Pasu and Paasam to get Jnana. Sankara's Maya is like a mirage. Saiva Siddhantists say Maya is real and is the cause for changes like ice changing to water.

The 28 Aagamas, Peria Puranam containing the life accounts of 63 Nayanmars or devotees, Thirumandiram of Thirumoolar, Devaram hymns of Thirujnana Sambandar, Thirunavukkarasar and Sundarar, Thiru Vachagam of Manickavachagar and the hymns of Karaikal Ammaiyar, Kalladar and Kapilar were - all classified into 12 sections or Tirumurais.

D: What are meant by the terms **Adhyasa and Vikasa?**

P: Adi Sankara defined Adhyasa or **superimposition** thus : "It is the apparent presentation to consciousness of something previously observed in some other thing". The attribute of one seems to be the attribute of another. It is not really so and it is due to ignorance. For example, the mirage formed by the hot refracted rays of the sun in air and seen as a pond of water at a distance is an illusion. A rope in darkness is taken for a snake.

In Advaita, the Brahmam is the only reality and everything else is unreal. In Sank-

ara's view, the soul is a reflection of the Brahmam. Only because of ignorance the individual soul identifies itself with the body, senses etc. which are only super imposed on it. The world seems to be true but it disappears when true knowledge dawns. This illusion is due to Maya which is neither existent nor non-existent and is a mystery. Sankara had to resort to Mayavadha (Super-imposition) of the Buddhists to explain that Brahmam is one without a second and that It is the only Existence.

Vikasa is the evolution of one thing from another. Patanjali calls this Jatiendra Parinama (Yoga Sutra IV - 2,3). When the sluice of a canal is opened, water flows down by itself. So all progress and power are already inherent in man. Attaining perfection is in man's power and if the bar is taken off, man progresses. A wicked man may become a saint, when the bar is taken off. The modern theory of evolution that it is due to survival of the fittest is inadequate. In fact, evolution is the manifestation of perfection which is already in every being.

D: Sir, what are **Kshetra, Avyakta and Akshara?**

P: **Kshetra** means field or place. The body is the kshetra for soul and the knower of this is Kshetrajna."I am the **Kshetrajna** in all Kshetras" says Lord Krishna. God is of small size (Amsa) in them.

In a broader sense, the universe is the field in which the individual body forms a part. To have the discrimination to distinguish between Kshetra and Kshetrajna one must have Jnana or knowledge which grows by the cultivation of discipline

such as absence of pride, and vanity, self control, nonattachment, devotion to God, imperturbation and such other virtues. The object to be known (Jneyam) is God who is immanent in everything including the individual soul and outside also. He is the source of all light and life. The soul is also called **Kshetri.** If the universe including our bodies form the **Kshetra,** then God is the **Kshetrajna.**

Avyakta is the state of Primordial Nature that immediately precedes the evolution of the various things in nature. It is the undeveloped state. The embryo in the seed is in the undeveloped (Avyakta) state. "At the end of a Cosmic cycle all beings and things pass into Nature (Prakriti) which is my own and at the beginning of a new cycle, I bring them out again into the Vyakta state". (B.G. IX - 7)

Akshara is the Brahmam itself which is indestructible. (Mundaka Upanishad 1 - 1 - 6)

D: Sir, what is **Bheda - Abheda?**

P: The Siddhanta Bheda - Abheda sees differences and non-difference in the relation between God and the individual soul. **Sage Asmarathya, Kumarila Bhatta, Bhaskara, Yadhava Prakasa, Nimbarkar** and **Chaitanya** were of this view. When we speak of a snake, we refer to its head and coil. Though Jivatma and God have the attributes of knowledge and bliss, the former possesses these only to a small extent.

These philosophers did not accept the Maya doctrine of Adi Sankara. To them, the world is real and is a form of God. Bhaskara compared the individual soul to the limited space in the pot. When the pot is destroyed, this space

mingles with the outside space. When Jiva attains salvation, he unites with Brahmam. They regarded Jiva as only an Amsa or part in Jnana of God just like a spark from a glowing ember.

D: Sir, I wonder why there should be such differences among philosophers when Brahma Sutras are meant to resolve the seemingly contradictory statements in Upanishads.

P: A Sutra (Sootra) is an aphorism, a very concise statement. It itself gives place to different interpretations. After all there is unity in difference. They are all united in saying that man is imperfect and he has to observe certain disciplines to get salvation though they differ about the state of the soul after reaching God. Advaita says there is absolute unity, just as the different rivers empty into the sea. Advaita speaks of Jiva (soul) as the reflection of God and not God himself. Others consider the soul as an Amsa or part of God and dualists say there can be only the relationship of master and servant even after salvation.

"These theories are the concern of the scholars. We need not worry about our state after attaining salvation but strive only to attain it", said Ramakrishna Paramahamsa. With regard to the Siddhantas, Sri Ramakrishna has said: 'Sankara's non-dualistic explanation is true, and so is the non-dualistic interpretation of Ramanuja' (Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna)

Swami Vivekananda has said in his paper "The Historical Evolution of India", "The movement of Sankara forced the way through the high intellectuals, but it could be of little service

to the masses, because of its adherence to caste laws, small scope for emotion, and making Sanskrit the vehicle of communication. But Ramanuja, with a most practical philosophy, great appeal to emotions, entire denial of birth rights before spiritual attainments and appeal through the popular tongue, completely succeeded in bringing the masses back to the Vedic religion".

Swami Ramakrishnanda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, says thus in his work, **"Life of Ramanuja":**

"Those who failed to comprehend the pure religion expounded by Sankara established once again, the reign of evil ways; then, the noble one who incarnated himself to bring about happiness, peace, bliss and truth was Sri Ramanuja".

10. HISTORY OF RENAISSANCE IN HINDUISM

D: Sir, the Vedas are considered to be the most ancient scriptures. Kindly tell me about their origin.

P: The **Rig Veda** is the most ancient. It was revealed by sages about 5000 years ago. Then **Yajur, Sama** and **Atharvana Samhitas** were revealed by sages. The Vedas have sections like **Brahmanas,** Aranyakas and Upanishads. Brahmanas give information regarding the conduct of Yagas, the meaning of Mantras and when to use them.

Aathreya and **Jaimini** have explained them. **Iythereya** and **Taiteeriya** Aranyakas teach philosophical principles to the old people following the third Aasrama Vanaprastha in the forest. **Chaandogya, Brahadaranyaka** and **Prasna Upanishads** are in the form of a dialogue. To read and understand the ideas, six Vedangas namely, **Sikshas, Vyakarna, Nrukta, Jyothisha, Kalpa** and **Chandas** were composed by **Panini** and other sages (Rishis). Upaveda, the four treatises on **Ayurveda, Dhanurveda, Gandharva Veda** and **Arthaveda** were also composed. I have already explained to you about them (in Chapter 3).

Sir, when were the Ramayana and the Mahabharata composed?

The Ramayana was composed by sage Valmiki about 1800 B.C. The present form of the Ramayana contains 24,000 verses. It is likely some verses might have been added later on. The Mahabharata was composed about 1500 B.C. The present form contains about one lakh verses. The Bhagavad Gita is a part of the Mahabharata. King Janaka, Vasishta, Viswamitra and Bharadwaja sages were contemporaries of Lord Rama. This period may be considered as the second stage in the History of Hinduism.

The caste system which was based on the principle of division of labour and efficiency maintained hereditary talent, solved unemployment to a certain extent and inculcated a feeling of unity and discipline, but the system was not very rigid in those days. Agastya married Lopamudra, princess of Vidarba. Devayani, the daughter of

Sukracharya, married King Yayati. **King Viswamitra** was accepted by sage **Vasishta** as Brahmarishi because of his acquiring spiritual power by penance. **Dronacharya** and **Krupacharya** who were Brahmin preceptors became warriors in Mahabharata War.

D: Sir, was there any change in the Vedic Religion later on?

P: As years rolled by, priests dominated the communities. Animals were sacrificed in rituals which were costly. The Mantras were not understood by the common people. So people wanted a new faith which could lead them to salvation. Scholars put forward several doctrines. In the 6th Century B.C., **Chaarvaka** advocated the materialistic doctrine. Jainism and Buddhism began to take root, advocating non-violence and right conduct.

It was a period of spiritual awakening in other countries also. **Confucius** in China, **Isaiah** in Greece, and **Zoraster** in Persia propagated their religions. The six Darsanas or philosophic systems, namely, Kapila's, Sankhya, Patanjali's Yoga, Gautama's Nyaya, Kanada's Vaiseshika, Jaimini's Mimamsa and Badarayana's Vedanta became prominent.

In 326 B.C. Greek King **Alexander** invaded North Western India and won the Battle of Jhelum. Greek Scholars like **Pythogoras** came to India and learnt arts, science and Vedanta. Buddhists and Indian Scholars went to Palestine and other West Asian countries to propagate their religion. **Kautilya,** the Chief Minister of King Chandra Gupta Maurya composed **Artha** Sastra, a treatise on politics. **Kaamasutras** by **Vatsayana** and **Grihasutras** by **Apastamba**

were composed. Buddhism was patronised by the Mauryan king **Asoka**. This period during which Buddhism and Vedic religion flourished may be taken as the third stage in the History of Hindu Religion.

D: Sir, when did the Vedic Religion alone regain its glory?

P: Buddhism had made the people passive and weak against foreign invaders. Pushyamitra, a Brahmin commander-in-chief, founded the Sunga dynasty in 184 B.C., and restored the glory of the Vedic Religion. He defeated Bacterian Greeks and reestablihed the martial spirit of the Hindus. **Patanjali** composed the **Mahabhashya,** a commentary on Paanini's Grammar, and also **Raja Yoga. Parasara** wrote a treatise on law. **Nagarjuna**, a South Indian Buddhist Monk, put forward Mathiamiga Sutras on **Relativity Theory.** He was also the Chief exponent of the Mahayana Buddhism during King Kanishka's rule. **Charaka** composed his work on Ayurveda. In South India the Thirukural, the Silapathikaram and other Tamil Sanga works were composed.

D: Sir, when were temples first built?

P: The period from 300 A.D. to 600 A.D. may be deemed as Puranic period when Puranas were composed. In North India Vaishnavaism was patronised by Gupta Kings. In South India both Saivaism and Vaishnavaism were patronised by Kings. Temples were first built of bricks and later with stones. Idols of Vishnu, Siva, Kumara, Vinayaka, Parvati and Lakshmi were worshipped. Cave temples were built at Ellora. Buddha was considered an Avatar of Vishnu and Buddhists

were assimilated into the Hindu Society.

The Huns became Hindu Kshatriyas in Rajastan and acted as soldiers to defend the North West region against invaders. Poets like **Bana, Kalidasa, Dandi** and **Scientists** like **Aryabhatta, Varahamihira** and **Brahmagupta** were in the Court of Vikramatitya II. Aryabhatta was the author of Surya Siddhanta and explained the cause of the eclipse of the sun and the moon. **Brahma Gupta** was the first to put forward the theory of earth's gravitation. This period of renaissance may be considered to be the fourth stage in the History of Hinduism.

D: Sir, when did the Alwars, Nayanmars and Acharyas propagate our Religion?

P: They lived between 600 A.D. and 1200 A.D. Devotional songs, Divya Prabhandam, Devaram and Thiruvachagam were composed by the Alwars and Saiva saints. The Acharyas Ramanuja, Sankara and Madhava propagated their Hindu Siddhantas. In the 7th Century during the reign of Pallava Kings the Cave Temples at Mamallapuram were built. The Brihadeeswarar Temple at Tanjore and Siva and Vishnu temples at Kanchi were built. Temples were built at Puri, Konarak, **Barabudoor** in Java, and **Ankhorwat** in Cambodia. Aagamas were written for the worship of God in temples. This period may be considered as the fifth stage in the History of Hinduism.

D: Sir, what was the position of Hinduism during the Muslim Regime?

P: Due to traitors like Jaichandra, the invading Muslims from Afghanistan established their

regime from 1200 A.D. to 1700 A.D. and propagated their religion mainly by violence. Many Hindus were forced to embrace Islam. The Hindus had become passive and did not learn the modern art of war and use of canons. Temples at Somnath, Matura, Benares, Ayodhya and in other places were destroyed by them. Yet Hinduism survived their onslaught.

The Bhakti movement was emotional and attracted the people. some of the saints of this movement were **Ramananda, Chaitanya, Meerabai, Vallaba, Thukaram, Tulsidas, Guru Nanak, Kabir, Soordas and Ramdas. Acharya Vidhyaranya** helped to establish the Vijayanagar Kingdom to prevent the Muslims from expanding their regime in South India. Krishnadevaraya composed **Aamuktamalika** in Telugu. **Samartha Ramadas** helped Kshatrapati Sivaji to found a Hindu State in Maharashtra.

D: Sir, what were the causes for the failure of the Hindus to stem the tide of invasion by foreign Muslims?

P: The reasons are several. 1. The Muslims used force to spread their religion. 2. The Indian princes did not join together to face the common danger. 3. The peaceful life of the people did not prepare them to face the danger. 4. The princes were not posted with the latest information in the art of warfare. 5. The Hindus followed the Dharma rules of war but the invading Muslims attacked them suddenly, destroyed their store of food and set fire to their cities.

6. There were traitors like Jayachandra. Ultimately the traitors were also destroyed by the Muslims. 7. Only the Kshatriyas among the

Hindus fought. They only wanted to be heroes and they did not make use of the various tricks of warfare. 8. As the people of lower castes were oppressed and were not trained in the art of war, they were indifferent as to who ruled them. People of East Bengal and Kashmir were converted to Islam by force. 9. Though the Hindu kings were defeated once, they did not join together at the opportune time to drive away the invaders. 10. Pride and over-confidence of the Hindus also contributed to their defeat. Moghal King Babar said, "The Hindus do not know how to fight. They know only how to die".

D: Sir, what was the state of Hinduism during the rule of the British?

P: The British people came to our country in the beginning of the 17th Century for trade. In course of time they built forts with the permission of the Princes to protect their goods. They supported some kings against their enemies and got territories for their military help. Later they wrested territories from these weak princes. They encouraged their Christian priests to go to the poor people in the villages to convert them to Christianity. They also offered jobs to the converted Christians and had their support and loyalty. Wise and competent people appeared on the scene to carry out reforms in Hinduism in response to the challenges of the times.

D: Sir, kindly tell me about them.

P: **RAJA RAM MOHAN ROY** (1774 - 1833) founded the **Brahma Samaj** in 1828 in Bengal. He said that religion should permit reasoning,

questioning and enquiry. He was against obsolute dogmas and conversions. "Every thing that is old need not be good" he said. He was opposed to worship of several gods and idols. He opposed idol worship and favoured collective worship in a temple founded by him. He was against Puranas and wanted teaching of Upanishads. He was for a casteless society. He got the practice of **Sati** abolished. He preached kindness to all.

SWAMI DAYANANDA SARASWATHI (1824 - 1883) founded **Arya Samaj** in 1875 in Punjab. He was born in Gujarat. He was for the teaching of Vedas and Upanishads. He was against Puranas, idol worship, caste distinctions and child marriage. By means of Suddhi (Purification) ceremony he reconverted people who had embraced other religions. Converted Muslims in Agra and Meerat rejoined Hinduism. He was for performance of Homa, rites like Upanayanam and remarriage of young widows. He wanted people to take pride in India's past glory and its ancient culture. He advocated Swadeshi movement. He founded many schools and colleges. His book **Satyartha Prakash** explains the tenets of Arya Samaj. Even now Arya Samaj workers carry on reconversion rites in Southern districts of Madras Province.

RAMALINGA SWAMI (1823 - 1874) in South India founded **Samarasa Sanmarga**, a way of worship for all by worshipping Light. He preached kindness to all. His **Thiruvarutpa** is a collection of excellent devotional poems.

SHIVA DAYAL (1818 - 1878) founded

the **Radha Swami faith**. Radha is the soul which must reach God (Swami) by devotion. He was influenced by the teachings of Sikh Gurus. He had his followers among the Sikhs and Hindus. His followers are now engaged in small scale industries at Dayal Bagh near Agra.

MADAME BLAVATSKY and **COLONEL OLCOTT** founded the **Theosophical Society** in U.S.A. in 1875 and transferred it to Adyar in Madras in 1889. Its objective was the creation of a World Society free from racial or ethnic barriers. **Dr. Annie Besant** who joined it in 1893 adopted Hindu way of life though she was born in Ireland. She accepted the Karma theory, re-incarnation, rebirth and Yoga science. She inculcated self-repect and self-confidence in Indians and spoke highly of the Hindu religion and its philosophy, morality, art and architecture. She was responsible for the starting of the Hindu college at Benaras.

RAMAKRISHNA PARAMAHAMSA (1836 - 1886 A.D.) This prophet of harmony of all religions was a priest in a temple at Dhakshineshwar in Bengal. Through the differing disciplines of various religions he realised the same God. Rabindranath Tagore speaks of him thus:

Diverse courses of worship
From varied springs of fulfilment
Have mingled in your meditation
The manifold revelation of the
joy of the Infinite.

Attracted by his irresistable spiritual power, people of all classes - agnostic and orthodox - felt the radiation of his spirit and were uplifted in his presence. He stressed on devotion, surrender to God and service to fellowmen in distress.

Romain Roland, French philosopher, says in his biography : "Sri Ramakrishna is the consummation of 3000 years of spiritual life of the people of India and a symphony of the thousand faiths of mankind".

Sri Ramakrishna spoke in parables to drive home philosophical truths. A few of them from the **Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna** are cited here. A man who has gone to a mango grove to eat mangoes will not be counting the leaves on the tree. A man who has gone to a shallow pond to drink water will not be stirring the water. A man who wants to realise God will not engage himself in Siddhanta quarrels.

An empty vessel makes sound. A man full of wisdom keeps calm and silent like a vessel filled with water. The bee ceases humming when it drinks the nectar. A man engages in useless arguments when he has not really seen God.

Books alone will not give real wisdom. A figure of a brinjal drawn on a paper will not be useful for cooking. One should have practice. Just as curd is churned easily in the morning to get butter, people should be trained at an early age to drink the nectar of devotion to God.

The frog with the tail lives only in water. But a matured frog without tail lives on land and also in water. A Jnani or realised person lives in the presence of God and also lives among people like a drop of water on a Lotus leaf.

With one gold piece various ornaments can be made. One God is worshipped in different countries with different forms and names.

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA (1863 - 1902) was the disciple of Sri Rama Krishna. He organised the Ramakrishna Mission. He attended the Parliament of Religions at Chicago in 1893 and revealed to the people there the glory and superiority of Hindu religion and Vedanta. He founded Vedanta Centres in America, England, France and in other Western countries.

He was against caste system, superstitions and inhuman practices. He exhorted Hindu reformers to serve the poor people in the villages and alleviate their sufferings. His twin ideals for the Mission were spirituality and service. These ideals have been achieved by starting hospitals, colleges, relief centres and by training Sannyasis of the Mission. The Sannyasis organise relief during periods of famine, flood or epidemics when poor people suffer.

Swami Vivekananda lives in his works and speeches which have been published in ten volumes. He is also remembered by his Katopanishad call to the young men, "Awake, arise, and stop not till the goal is reached". He worshipped the only God-poor man. He did not want to be selfish to aspire for salvation but wanted to be born again and again to serve the poor people in distress.

Dr. Radhakrishnan, philosopher and former President of India said, "Universality, service to humanity, practice of religion and transformation of human individuals are the goals of religion. These are the lessons which Swami Vivekananda taught us".

SWAMI SIVANANDA founded the **Divine Life Society** at Rishikesh and published books on philosophy, Vedanta, Medicine and Yoga.

SRI AUROBINDO (1872 - 1950) taught integral yoga at Pondicherry and stresed on devotion, faith and self - surrender to God.

SRI RAMANA MAHARISHI advocated the path of self-enquiry "Who am I" to get realisation. He was at Thiruvannamalai in Madras state.

SRI SANKARACHARYA of **Kanchi** radiates light all round. He has organised All World Hindu Conference and contributes to the spiritual needs of Hindus in foreign countries also.

ACHARYA BHAKTI VEDANTA SWAMI organised "Hare Krishna Movement" in Western countries and spread the teachings of Chaitanya.

MAHATMA GANDHI is the apostle of non-violence and the Father of our Nation. He delivered India from bondage with his new weapon of passive resistance or Sathyagraha. He worked for Hindu- Muslim unity and Harijan uplift. He was more unselfish than the Sannyasis because he did not care for his salvation but gave all his time for the saving of the souls of other people. He was a devout Hindu and said, "Love your enemies and forgive them". Even devoted Christian Missionaries acknowledged his greatness and revered him. He would hold communion with God in the dead of night and take his decisions.

11. HINDUISM AS THE MOTHER OF RELIGIONS

D: Sir, how did Hinduism get its name?

P: The religion practised by the Hindus is called **Hinduism.** Dravidians and later Aryans lived on the banks of the river Sindu. They were called Hindus. In our scriptures it is said a Hindu is one who grieves on seeing violence to a living thing. A Hindu shows his love for all living beings. **Saint Thirumoolar** says, "Siva means love and one who shows it becomes Siva himself". Indu means moon, which signifies intelligence and Indians are generally intelligent. Hinduism has been called **Sanathana Dharma**, the indestructible and ever-existing way of life.

D: Are there not religions other than Hinduism?

P: Religions can be broadly classified as revealed religions and natural religions. A religion is revealed by a saint by the grace of God. Barbarians worship trees, spirits etc., and this worship may be a natural religion. Islam was revealed by **Mohamed** in Arabia, Christianity by Jesus in Palestine and Buddhism by **Buddha** in India. Sikhism, Jainism, Buddhism and Zorastrianism may be considered as sects of Hinduism.

D: Sir, where are these religions prevalent?

P: Besides India Hindus live in Mauritius, Fiji, America, South Africa and Ceylon. Buddhists live in China, Japan, Indo-china, Burma and Ceylon. Muslims live in Arabia, North Africa, Iraq, Iran, Afganistan, Turkey, Syria, Egypt, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia and Malaysia. Christians live

in large numbers in America, England, Europe, Africa and Australia. Jains and Parsis live only in India.

D: Which is the most ancient and greatest of all these religions, Sir?

P: Dr.**Hogg** who was a Christian priest and a former principal of Madras Christian College has said thus : "**Hinduism is the most ancient religion which contains principles from the lowest to the highest. It has spiritual paths chalked out for different kinds of persons at different mental stages. It has an excellent philosophy. The conception of Aatma, Rebirth, Karma theory and Reincarnation is special to Hinduism alone**". Showing mercy, love, brotherliness, forgiveness and service to the weak mentioned in other religions are in Hinduism itself. That is why **Swami Vivekananda** stated at the conference of World Religions at **Chicago** in U.S.A. that **Hinduism is the mother of all Religions.**

D: Revered Sir, I can better understand the unique excellence of Hinduism only when I know in detail about other religions. I pray therefore that you may be pleased to tell me about Jain religion first.

P: In the sixth century B.C. Hinduism lost its pristine purity and grandeur. Hindu society had become degenerate. Rites and rituals were costly and the Upanishad philosophy was too high to be understood by common people. Sacrifices had become bloody. **Mahaveera** and **Buddha** revolted against this state of religion. They were reformers who wanted to cleanse Hinduism of its corrupt practices and impart a new rational approach.

Varthamana Mahaveera was born in 599 B.C. to Siddhartha near Vaisali. At the age of 30 he became an ascetic and did penance. After 13 years he got Enlightenment. He was called **Jina**, the conqueror of Indriyas or passions. His followers were called **Jains**. He went from place to place for propagating his principles. **King Ajata Saturu**, **Bimbisara** and **Chandra Gupta Maurya** followed his religion. Mahaveera was the last and 24th **Theerthankara**, a saint who took people along a bridge across the ocean of existence or Samsara. According to the sacred books of the Jains **Rishaba** who is mentioned in the Rig Veda and in the Bhagavatha is said to be the first Theerthankara. **Neminatha** who was said to be a contemporary of **Bhagavan Krishna** was the 22ndTheerthankara. **Parsvanatha** was the son of Aswasena who lived in the 9th century B.C. as king of Benaras. Parswanatha is said to be the 23rd Theerthankara. The followers of Parsvanatha were called Svethambaras or white-clad. The followers of Varthamana Mahaveera were called Digambaras or sky-clad. Their ascetics did not wear any clothes Mahaveera passed away near Patna in 527 B.C. at the age of 72.

Sir, kindly tell me about the teachings of Mahaveera?

Mahaveera denied the existence of a separate God as the creator of the universe. He said, "**God is only the highest, noblest and fullest manifestation of the powers lying latent in the soul of man**". Parsvanatha advocated four principles which were (1) Non-stealing, (2) Not to injure a life, (3) Not to tell lies and (4) Not to

possess property. Mahaveera added a fifth prohibition to these four and that was the vow of celibacy or Brahmacharya. The Digambaras are more rigorous and puritans.

The Jains hold that souls exist not only in animals but also in particles of dust. The souls in them have different states of consciousness and the souls in dust are said to be devoid of sense. Every soul is capable of infinite power and happiness. It depends on Karma or past actions in previous births.

To remove the bondage and get freedom from past Karma one has to observe austerity, non-violence, fasting, doing penance, giving up worldly pleasures etc. Three things are necessary namely **(1) Right faith in the teachings, (2) Right knowledge of their teachings and (3) Right conduct.**

These are the three jewels or **Triratna**. By following these, one can get liberation or **Nirvana**. An ascetic has to control his passions, his thought, speech and actions, perform good deeds and lead a life of self-mortification. Jain temples are now in **Mount Abu, Ellora Saravana Belgola** in Mysore, Gujarat and Rajastan. Many of their temples were destroyed by Allauddin Khilji and converted into Mosques. Jainism produced great scholars in Logic, Grammar, Mathematics, Astronomy, Politics and Science. **Hemachandra** wrote the Yogasastra. **Amarasimha** was the author of **Amarakosa.**

The Jain religion has two principles Jiva (living thing) and Ajiva (Non-living thing). Jivas of mankind are classified as **Anadhi Siddha,**

Siddha and **Baddha.** The twentyfour Theerthankars are called Anadhi Siddhas. Siddhas are those who have attained liberty; Baddhas are Samsaries or people who lead family life. They experience pain and pleasure and are bound by passions. There is no God for creation, sustenance and destruction. The soul is indestructible. But according to the Karma, one is born as man or animal. Soul is said to be of the size of the body according to the Jains. One should get rid of desire and attachment, and get eight kinds of qualities like Jnana. Then the said person gets liberation from birth and death, goes to the sky and will be there. It is Mukti or **Parinirvana.** Ajiva are things without life. **Tatra Deepam** and **Dharsana Sutras** explain their philosophy.

Jain industrialists patronise Jainism in Gujarat and Rajasthan. They belong to Swetambara sect. The Jains in the South belong to the Digambara sect. They were good at painting, drama, music, sculpture and other arts. The Tamil works such as Silappadikaram, Manimekalai, Pavanandi's grammar are the works of Jains. As Jainism has faith in rebirth, Karma theory and permanency of soul, it is only a sect of Hinduism.

D: Sir, was Buddha born after Mahaveera?

P: **Siddhartha,** the founder of Buddhism was born after Mahaveera in 567 B.C. at Kapilavastu, at Nepal's border. His father was **King Suddhodana.** When **Gautama** was 29 his wife Yasodhara gave birth to a son who was named **Rahula**. Siddhartha was much pained at the sight of a dying man and a diseased man. He began to think of the miseries

of life. One night he left his wife and child, renounced the princely life and went to a forest. He did penance for a number of years. At last in his 35th year, he realised **Supreme Knowledge** under a Bodhi tree at Bodh Gaya. He preached his religion to his five disciples. Buddha means **The Enlightened One**. He preached his message for 45 years and attained **Parinirvana** in his 80th year.

D: Sir, kindly tell me about Buddhism.

P: Buddha preached the Middle Path. He asked his followers to avoid the two extremes of life of severe asceticism and life of luxury. His four **Noble Truths** are the following:

1. The world is full of sorrow - disease, death, despair etc.

2.. Desire and attachment are the causes of sorrow.

3. Man can be free from miseries by conquering desires. Then he attains Nirvana, the highest aim of life.

4. By destroying passions, he will not be born again. For this one should know the right way, the **Ashtanga marga** or the **Eight-Fold Path:**

(a) Right View, (b) Right Resolve, (c) Right Speech, (d) Right Conduct, (e) Right Livelihood, (f) Right Effort, (g) Right Mindedness and (h) Meditation.

Right Conduct includes the **Panchseela** or the five vows to refrain from killing, falsehood, stealing, anger and intoxication. One destroys ignorance if one knows that the world is not permanent. By doing good deeds man will be leading a higher life and finally he will get **Parinirvana**

by getting free from the bondage of Karma.

Vinayapitaka, Suddha Pitaka and **Abhidamma Pitaka** are the three Buddhist scriptures. The first lays down rules for the conduct of monks. The second contains the teachings of Buddha and the philosophy of Buddhism. The teachings are simple. There are many penances or austerities. He did not recognise castes. The teachings were in Pali, the language of the people. All are free to get salvation. Buddha taught through parables taken from daily life and so Buddhism was popular. Several kings patronised it. **Vasubandhu** wrote books on ethics, psychology and metaphysics Nagarjuna, a south Indian was an all round scholar in mathematics, chemistry, metallurgy and metaphysics. The famous universities of **Taxila, Nalanda** and **Vikramsila** served as centres of education as well as seats of Buddhist philosophy for the use of foreigners also.

The Buddhists say life is transitory. All things are bound to decay. Whatever has a beginning also has an end. This is the theory of **Anityavada.** His followers developed the **Theory of Momentariness** which says that things exist for one moment only. So soul is transitory according to them.

There are four schools of Buddhist philosophy:

1. The **Madhyamigas** claim to hold a middle position. They are **Nihilists.** They believe in **Soonyavada.** To them everything is illusory or Maya and the world is also unreal.
2. The **Yogacharas** are idealists. They say that Jnanam alone is real but it will also decay. These people practise Yoga.
3. The **Vaibhashikas** are realists. They say that

things are real but everything exists only for a moment. The soul is only Jnanam or intelligence. It will also decay.

4. **Sountrantikas** also accept the reality of things in this world but say that they will be changing every moment.

There are a number of sects under the Mahayana and the Hinayana branches. The Hinayana Buddhists do not worship Buddha images. "How can things come out of nothingness? Is there an intelligent principle behind the aggregate of atoms? When are they brought about and by whom? If they are stationary, the theory of momentariness is refuted. If they are momentary, we cannot say they come into existence and then unite. They cannot exist according to them for more than a moment. If there is no intelligent principle how can the non-intelligent atoms aggregate? If a thing is destroyed, out of what is the next thing produced? If soul is momentary and Mukti is also momentary, why should man strive for liberation and what is the use of ethics? Will there be memory if experience is momentary? **Nihilism** of Buddhists is illogical in every way. It is against Sruti, Smriti, perception and inference" says Badarayana, the author of **Brahma sutras** (2,2.32). The Naiyayikas and the Vaiseshikas state that the world is formed out of atoms. "It is wrong" says Badarayana, "since there must be somebody to bring about the combination of atoms".

Sir, why should we regard Buddhism and Jainism only as sects of Hinduism"?

Both Jainism and Buddhism accept rebirth, Karma theory and Mukti or Nirvana. They say ignorance is the root cause of desire and misery

and the world is not permanent. Their ethics and non-violence are all expounded by the Upanishad. The monastic system introduced by them was already practised by people in Sannyasa Asrama. Buddha got enlightenment through Yoga and Meditation.

D: Is there a God for Buddhists?

P: Buddha did not say anything about God, because he only wanted reforms. He was against animal sacrifice and superstitious practices. The Hinayana Buddhists (Low Vehicle) do not have a God. The Mahayanists (Great Vehicle) worship the idol of Buddha.

D: Why do not the Jains take food at night?

P: They do not take food at night because insects may fall on the lamp and get killed.

D: What is the difference between Buddhism and Jainism?

P: There are many similarities between them. Both Buddha and Mahaveera were princes and were born in Magadha. They were against Vedas, rituals, animal sacrifices, castes and violence. Both insisted on good deeds. Both believed in Karma theory, and rebirth. But the Jains glorified self-mortification and austerities. There are house-holders also in Jain Mutts, but there are only Sanyasis in the Buddhist Mutts. There are no female sannyasinis among the Digambara Jains. The Jains have a modified caste system and continue to follow certain Hindu festivals. The Buddhists do not believe in souls but in consciouness. Jains believe that all living and non-living things have souls. Buddhism adjusted itself to the needs of foreigners. But Jainism was confined to India alone because the Jains were forbidden to travel over the ocean for fear that fish may be killed by ships.

D: Sir, did the Christian religion arise in West Asia? Was it influenced by Buddhism?

P: **Jesus Christ** who expounded Christianity was a Jew.

He was born 1992 years ago if we are now in 1992 A.D. In the Pali language which was prevalent in North India and Singhala, Krishna was called Krist. The stories told about the birth of Krishna and Christ are almost similar. The old Bible contains stories from Bauddha Purana. The Buddhist doctrines such as brotherliness, mercy, love and forgiveness can be found in christianity. During Asoka's reign Buddhists went to West Asia to propagate their religion. They took their legends and parables with them. The Apocrypha which originated in the second century was added to the old testament. It contains Buddhist literature.

After death the spirit or soul is said to go to God, the Father-in-Heaven who will consider its good and bad actions and send it to the Heaven or Hell. There will be no opportunity for the erring soul to get rebirth to turn over a new leaf. Christians have no faith in rebirth and Karma theory. Why a good man suffers can be explained only by the Karma Theory.

Sir, are there sects in Christianity also?

There are sects in all religions. Catholics have belief in the legends of old Testament also. They worship idols of Mary and Christ and celebrate festivals for them as the Hindus do. The pretestants believe only in the New Testment. They are not idol worshippers. There are many sects also in these two branches.

Sir, who was the founder of Islam? Kindly tell me about this religion.

Islam was founded by **Mohamed**. He was born in 570 A.D. at Mecca. At the age of 25 he got

employed under Khadija, a rich widow. After sometime he married her. Mohamed was against idol worship. He used to go to a hill near-by for meditation. At the age of 40 he got Enlightenment and began to preach against idolatry.

Mohamed had to flee from Mecca in 622 A.D. and go to Medina. He conquerad Medina and later Mecca also in 630 A.D. His teachings are contained in the Holy Book Quron which means 'to be read'. He had no belief in rebirth and Karma Theory. He prescribed five duties to his followers:

a. Faith in one God and in him as prophet.
b. Offering prayers five times a day.
c. Offering 1/40 of one's income for charity.
d. Observing Ramzan fast in a particular month and
e. Going on pilgrimage to Mecca.

Islam means 'Surrender to God'. It is against caste distinctions, murder, violence, drinking alcohol and theft. Their laws called **Shariat** prescribe severe punishment for theft, and murder for adultery. There are two important sects-Sunnis and Shias. The **Sunnis** regard the first three **Khalifas** (religious leaders) as legitimate successors. But **Shias** regard them as usurpers. There are many sects also among these two main sects. **Bohras, Ahmediyas** and **Sufis** are some of the sects.

Sufi Mulla Nasurudin came to India from Baghdad to study the Bhakti movement and Indian philosophy. The Sufis give importance to emotion. They worship with songs and dance.

D: Sir, when did **Sikhism** make its presence in India? Kindly tell me about it.

P: **Guru Nanak** founded this religion. He was born in 1469 A.D., at Talwandi, now called Nankanah in West Punjab. From the early age he had a religious bent of mind and used to meditate often. When he was thirty, he began to travel all over India. He also went to Persia and Arabia. He returned to his village after twenty years. He preached his religion and passed away in 1539 A.D. Low class common people who did not understand Sanskrit became his followers.

Sikhism accepts the doctrines of Karma, Maya and Moksha. **Guru Nanak** taught that service to mankind was the most important. He was against idolatry and distinctions based on caste, race or colour. He was also against asceticism and renunciation. He was himself a poet. He composed hymns. These were compiled along with those of Kabir, Jayadeva, Tulsidas, Namadev and Ramananda in a holy book called **Adigranth** by **Guru Arjuna** and other gurus who succeeded him. The fifth Guru Arjuna was executed by Jehangir. The sixth **Guru Hargobind** who was Arjuna's son trained his followers in the art of war. The ninth Guru **Tegh Bahadur** who carried a compaign against the forcible conversion of Hindus to Islam was executed by Aurangazeeb.

The tenth Guru **Gobind Singh** disciplined the Sikhs and asked them to be warriors of God. He asked them not to smoke and not to drink alcohol. He built forts. He asked the Sikhs to have five emblems.

1. To grow hair and beard (Kesa)
2. To have a comb (Kanga)

3. To wear a sword (Kirpan)
4. To wear breeches (Kacha) and
5. To wear metal bracelets (Kada)

He said there would be no Guruship after him and the holy **Adigranth** would itself be regarded as Guru. He chose five devout Sikhs for the **Khalsa** (Pure) **Sangh** in 1699 to take care of the Sikhs. He asked the Sikhs to be united and protect the freedom of the country. Even today the Sikhs form the foremost loyal and sturdy warriors to guard our frontiers. Govind Singh passed away in 1700.

D: Sir, you have told me about the Indian system of philosophy. May I know about the western system of philosophy?

P: **Sankhya, Nyaya, Vyseshika, Yoga Mimamsa** and **Vedanta** are the six Indian systems of philosophy. In the statement "The distance between the places Mylapore and Mambalam is 5 km", if you define the words 'distance' and 'place', then you talk of philosophy. Though definitions of concepts occur in every subject, the word philosophy is now used to explain relationship among God, souls and the universe, Philosophy is useful to get rid of fear, overcome misery and maintain good character. The aim of religion is to follow a right way of living.

If Philosophy involves good thoughts, Religion leads to good action. The science of moral principles or Ethics is useful to follow the religion and the science of reasoning or logic to understand philosophy. How did the world come into existence? What is mind? What is soul? What do you

mean by God? Do you think God has auspicious qualities? These questions have been engaging the thoughts of philosophers from time immemorial. The westerners are trying to learn our systems of philosophy. They have such theories as Creationism, Pragmatism and Representative realism. Many in the West now study Hindu Philosophy and Bhagavad Gita.

D: Revered Sir, what are the special merits of our religion?

P: 1. All the good doctrines mentioned in other religions are in our Hinduism. But the high philosophical concepts of Hindu Vedanta are not found in other religions.

2. Research scholars say that Hinduism was prevalent in the whole world even in ancient times.

3. Hinduism is a scientific religion and its doctrines are not against science. Modern researches about meditation only enhance the merit of **Patanjali's Yoga Sastra.**

4. Hinduism states that both house-holders and Sannyasis of any class or caste can attain salvation.

5. It shows different paths of salvation according to the mentality of the people.

6. Our Hindu religion has not been founded by any particular prophet as in Christianity and Islam. The Vedas have been in existence from time immemorial. They have been revealed to saints by God.

7. It shows how one can lead the religious or spiritual life along with the worldly or material life and yet attain the highest aim of life, namely Mukti or Salvation.

12. HINDU SAINTS AND PRECEPTORS

D: Sir, who were responsible for the spread of Saivaism and Vaishnavaism in South India?

P: Upto 6th Century Buddhism and Jainism were patronised by kings and so people also followed these religions. The Yagas or sacrifices of Vedic religion were costly and difficult to perform. Jainism and Buddhism showed a simple path for Nirvana or salvation and so these religions attracted the people. At this period the devotees of Vishnu, the Alwars, and the devotees of Siva, the Nayanmars appeared on the scene. They were devoted Bhaktas and inspired poets. They were well-equipped with the knowledge of Upanishads and Puranas. By their preaching they brought about a complete change in the minds of the people.

D: Sir, kindly tell me about these Alwars. Why were they called so? What were their achievements?

P: The Alwars were 12 in number. As they dived deep into the ocean of love and the auspicious qualities of Vishnu, they were called **Alwars**. The first three Alwars were contemporaries. They lived in the 6th Century A.D.

1. **POIGAI ALWAR** : He got this name because he was born near a lotus pond in Kanchi. In 100 verses of First Antadi he describes the nature of God, the relation between the soul and God and the path of surrender to reach Him. He sings about God's creation and says he would compose the poem using the earth as the lamp, the seawater as the oil and the sun as the light.

2. **BHOODA ALWAR** : This Alwar was born at Mamallapuram. Bhooda means essence or bliss. He revelled in the love and auspicious qualities of Vishnu and attained bliss. He composed the second Thiru

vantadi consisting of 100 verses. Thiruvantadi is a kind of poem in which the last word in a verse is used as the first word in the succeeding verse. He says that all men are equal before God and Bhakti or love of God alone is the best means of reaching God. He possessed transcendental knowledge and high degree of devotion. He tells us about Vamana, Varaha and Narasimha Avatars, the episodes of Krishna in boyhood and revels in them.

3. **PEYALWAR** : He was born at Mylapore in Madras. As the name indicates, he was God-intoxicated. He would dance, weep and laugh and was mad with God's love. In the first opening verse in his Third Antadi consisting of 100 verses he says that he had the vision of Vishnu in His respledent form with his conch and discus. He would always think of Narayana, sing of Him, dance, weep, laugh and prostrate just like a mad man.

One dark night when there was a storm with lightning and the rain was pouring down in torrents, it so chanced that the three Alwars took shelter at a wayside inn near Thirukoilur. They were talking about the auspicious qualities of Vishnu and his Avatars, when they saw all of a sudden a splendour of light amidst the pitch darkness and in the light they had the vision of Vishnu with his conch and discus. This poet describes this vision in his verse.

4. **THIRUMAZHISAI ALWAR** : He was born at Thirumazhisai, a village near Madras city. He lived in the 6th Century A.D. He left his village and went on a pilgrimage to the holy shrines. In

one of his verses he says that he practised Yoga and studied Jainism, Sankhya and Saiva philosophy. It was Peyalwar who converted him to Vaishnavaism. He was a Siddha. There are several stories about his occult powers.

This Alwar has composed Thiruchantha Virutham of 196 verses and Nanmugan Thiruvanthadi of 96 verses. In them he speaks of the auspicious attributes of God and His Avatars. He says that the path of self-surrender is the best to attain salvation. He speaks of his mystical experiences and states that Lord Vishnu alone can grant him salvation or bliss. The structure of words and metre of the verses are such as to produce sweet music.

5. **NAMMALWAR** : He is also known as **Maran, Satakopa, Vahulaparana** and **Parankusa.** He was born at Thirukurukoor alias Alwar Thirunagari in Thirunelveli District of Tamil Nadu. His parents belonged to the Vellalar caste. In the fifth year he began meditation under a tamarind tree. He was dumb till his 16th year. Madhurakavi who had heard of him went to see him. Nammalwar woke up from his meditation and dictated verses which Madhurakavi took down. **Thiruvirutham** of 100 verses is his first work. In this he regards himself as the love (Nayaki) and God as the lover (Nayaka). He gives an account of the pilgrimage of the soul in its ascent to the supreme God. **Thiruvasiriam** consists of seven verses which describe his vision of Sriman Narayana lying on His bed of Anantha on the surface of the ocean of milk. **Periathiruvantadi** consists of 87 verses in which he instructs his mind to praise the greatness of God.

The most important of his poems is **Thiruvoimozhi** which consists of 1102 verses. This has been compared to the Vedas. This sings of the glorious attributes of God and the poet's mystical experience of the vision of God. These verses are being sung in Vishnu temples. Many learned commentaries have been written for this work. The first 30 verses contain the gist of Vedas.

Nammalwar says that it is Lord Vishnu alone who remains Antaryami in gods receives the worship. Soon after this Alwar was born he neither wept nor drank his mother's milk. As he was different from other children he was called **Maran**. As he got angry with natural instincts like hunger and kept them off, he was called **Satakopan**. He had the vision of all the Murthis (idols) in the 108 sacred places and he sang in praise of them though he had not gone to those places.

It is wonderful how he was able to compose such beautiful poems without studying grammar or the philosophy of Vedas. It was all revelation by the grace of God. As he was the most distinguished of all Alwars, he is said to have been addressed by God as "My Alwar" and so he was called **"Nammalwar"**.

In Vishnu temples a **Satari** is placed over the heads of worshippers. **Satari** is a conical shaped vessel and on its top the two feet of God are engraved. The devotees then feel they are blessed by God. This copper vessel coated with silver is named Satari after Satakopa in recognition of his intense devotion. Tamil poet **Kambar** has sung

Satakopa Anthadi in praise of Satakopa. He says that the study of Thiruvoimozhi will give anybody Mukti or salvation. Nammalwar lived upto the age of thirty five and attained Mukti.

6. **MADHURAKAVI ALWAR** : Madhurakavi was an old Brahmin who had been to Benares on pilgrimage. Seeing a vision in the South he started and came to Thirukurukoor. He saw Maran in meditation. To test him he threw a small stone on him. After sometime Maran woke up. Madhurakavi realised that Maran was a great seer. He became his disciple and spent his time in singing his master's songs. He was himself an expert in composing poems of four kinds. But only one of his compositions survives. It begins with the words "**Kanninun Chiruthambu**" - a small cord dearer than the eye. It contains ten verses. He says that Nammalwar himself was God to him. Madhurakavi is an example of a devotee of God's devotee. **Kambar** says that he drew inspiration from Madhurakavi's poem to compose his poem '**Satakopa Antadi**' on Nammalwar.

7. **KULASEKARA ALWAR** : He was the ruler of Cheranad (a part of Kerala). He lived in the 8th century A.D. Disgusted with leading a material life, he gave up his reign in favour of his son and went to Srirangam to worship Lord Ranganatha. He had proficiency in Tamil and Sanskrit languages. In Sanskrit he composed **Mukundamalai** in which he makes self-surrender to Lord Krishna. He has composed **Perumal Thirumozhi** consisting of 106 verses. He has sung about the presiding deities of Vithvakodu, Srirangam and Thiru Vengadam. He uses the technique of the love of a girl

for her husband and the love of a mother for her child in his approach to God. In the last section he identifies himself with Dasaratha who laments for his exiled son, Rama. His poem expresses the inwardness of vision which a soul experiences in its travel towards God. His verses are pregnant with celestial fire.

8. **PERIALWAR** : He was known as Vishnu Siddha, a Brahmin who lived at Srivilliputtur in Tamil Nadu in the 8th Century A.D. He was serving God by making garlands from the flowers in his garden and offering them to the temple for adorning the idol. He has sung **Thirumozhi** of 472 verses and also **Thirupallandu** in praise of God Vishnu. The latter is sung by devotees every morning. In Thirumozhi the Alwar assumes the role of the parents of Krishna and also the friends of Krishna. He enjoys singing about His experiences at the various stages in the childhood of Krishna. **Godha**, known as **Andal,** was his foster-daughter. Perialwar went to the assembly of scholars at Madura, presided over by the king Vallaba Deva Pandian. There he explained the nature and attributes of Lord Vishnu and got a bunch of gold coins as his prize. He is also known as **Pattar-piran**. He lived for 85 summers.

9. **ANDAL** was the only woman Alwar and was called Godha. She was the foster-daughter of Perialwar. She is said to have been born in 716 A.D. and was found by **Perialwar** in his garden amidst Tulsi plants. Even from childhood Andal began to worship Lord Krishna. When she became a maiden, she began to worship Him as her beloved and wished to be married to Him alone.

She has composed **Thirupavai** of 30 verses and **Nachiar Thirumozhi** of 142 verses. **Pavai Nonbu** is the observance by virgin girls in the month of Marga Sirsha (December - January) to get good husbands. The girls get up in the morning and after taking bath worship God Krishna singing these hymns. These hymns are sung not only by girls but also by men as the songs express happiness in worshipping God. In Nachiar Thirumozhi Andal tells of her dreams about her marriage with the Lord. The verses beginning with **Varanamayiram** are sung during marriage ceremonies.

Perialwar took Andal to the temple at Srirangam where the spiritual marriage of Andal with Lord Ranganatha was performed. It is said Andal merged with the light that appeared in the idol.

10. **THONDARADIPODI ALWAR** : This poet was known as **Vipranarayana.** He was born in a Brahmin family in the 8th Century A.D. at Thirumandalakudy in Tamil Nad. He used to make garlands of Tulsi leaves and supply them to the temple. Vipranarayana fell a victim to the charms of a dancing girl and lost his garden and property. At last enlightenment dawned on him by the grace of God. He has composed **Thirumalai** a garland of 45 verses. He repents for his past sinful life and praises the grace of God in correcting him. His second work is **Thirupalliyezhuchi** of ten verses. It is a song of awakening God for worship and is being sung at dawn at home by Vaishnavites and at temples.

11. **THIRUPAN ALWAR** : He was born at Uraiyur in Tamil Nadu in the 8th Century. He belonged to the caste of the untouchables. He used

to stand outside the temple at Srirangam and sing about the glories of Lord Ranganatha onhis Veena. Lord Ranganatha was so much moved by his devotion that He directed the priest of the temple, Loka **Saranga** in his dream to take him and bring him to Him. The Brahmin priest carried him on his shoulders and brought him into the Sanctum Sanctorum disregarding the protests ofThirupanAlwar himselfthat the priest should not touch an untouchable. In the presence of Lord Ranganatha the Alwar sang ten verses beginning with 'Amalanadhi piran' and at the end of the tenth verse when he said that he would not set his eyes on anything else after seeing God, his spirit merged into the idol. These verses describe the beauty of God's personality and the Alwar's absolute surrender to God.

12. **THIRUMANGAI ALWAR** : He was a petty chief of the Kallar tribe in Tamil Nadu. He lived in the 8th Century A.D. He loved a beautiful maiden who agreed to marry him only if he agreed to feed a thousand devotees of Lord Vishnu every day for a period of one year. He did so and married her. The love for the girl later changed into love of God. He is said to have built the seven - fold Prakaras and stonewalls of Sri Rangam temple. He was an expert in composing the four kinds of Tamil verses - Asu, Madura, Chitthra and Visthara. He was a contemporary of **Thiru Jnana Sambandar** who appreciating his poetic talent presented him with a spear. This Alwar has sung in praise of the presiding deities of several Vishnu temples. His **Periathirumozhi** consists of 1084 verses; **Thiru Ezhukootrikai** consists of one verse - **Chiru Thirumadal** con-

Vedas from his maternal uncle Kidambi Apppular (Athreya Ramanujacharya). He became expert expounder of Sastras both in Tamil and in Sanskrit. **Vidhyaranya**, his boyhood friend, requested him to adorn the court of **Vijayanagar**. But Venkatesa saying that he was shunning the unreal materialism and royal honour wrote **Vyragia Panchakam** (five verses) in reply and sent it to him. Venkatesa was honoured with the titles **Nigamanta Maha Desikan, Vedanta Acharya, Kavitharki Ka Simham,** and **Sarvatantra Swatantrar.** He lived at Thiruvahindrapuram near Cuddalore for some years. Then he went to Srirangam and lived there propagating Visishtadvaita philosophy for 14 years. He attained eternal bliss at the age of 101.

Sri Desikan has composed several Stotras like **Sristuti, Bhustuti, Godastuti, Nyasa Dasakam, Daya Sadakam** and **Raghuvira Gadyam.** He has written Kavyas like **Yadavapyudam** and **Hamsa Sandesam**, a drama named **Sankalpa Suryodhayam**, Vedanta works like **Mimamsapaduka,** Commentaries like **Rahasya Raksha, Gitartha Sangraha** and Rahasya treatises like **Rahasya thraiya Saaram.** He has also to his credit Tamil works such as **Amruthaswadini, Adaikalapattu, Arthapanchakam** and **Prabanda Saaram.**

MANAVALA MAMUNI : Azhakia Manavala was born at Alwar Thirunagari in Thirunelveli District in 1366 A.D. He studied under Sailanatharia (Thiruvoi Mozhi Pillai). Kidambi Nayanar and others and became an expert in both Tamil and Sanskrit scriptures. When he was looking after **Ethiraja Sannadhi** at Alwar Thirunagari, he composed the poem **Ethiraja**

Vimsadhi in Sanskrit. Then he went to Srirangam and began preaching Thiruvoimozhi to devotees. He visited Vishnu temples and organised maintenance work of the temples. Finding the householder's life an obstacle to his work he became a Sannyasi.

Ramanuja appointed 74 Simhasanapathis (leaders) to carry on the religious work. Manavala Mamuni appointed 8 spiritual leaders to carry on the religious propaganda after him. One of them was the Jeer who founded the Vanamamalai Mutt at Nanguneri. Manavala Muni has written in Sanskrit **Devaraja Mangalam, Mangala Sasanapathya mala, Pramana Sangraham** and **Gita tatparya Deepam.** In Tamil he has written **Upadesa Ratnamalai, Thiruvoimozhi Nootrvanthadhi, Aarthiprabantam** and others. Vaishnavaites of Tenkalai (Southern) School regard him as their founder.

D: Sir, the festival of 63 Nayanmars is being celebrated at Mylapore. Kindly tell me about these Nayanmars.

P: The **Nayanmars** were devotees of Siva. They lived between the 6th century and 9th century A.D. **Sekizhar** who lived in the 12th century has sung about the 63 Nayanmars in his work **Periapuranam.** Of these Nayanmars, **Appar, Sambandar, Sundarar and Manicka vachakar** are well-known as four saints of Saivaism. They spread the Saiva Bhakti movement through their melodious hymns. The hymns of the first three saints are known as **Thevaram** (garland of poems to God).

Appar : He is also known as **Thirunavukar-**

asar. He lived in the 8th Century A.D. for more than 80 years. He was a Vellala by birth. He became a devout Jain monk at first. He had a severe stomach-ache which could not be cured by the Jains. He sought the help of his sister **Thilakavathiar** who was a devout Saivite. she advised him to pray to Lord Siva. He sang hymns in praise of Siva and it is said his stomach-ache was cured. He had studied the Vedas. He cured **Mahendra Varman**, the Pallava King, of his disease and converted him from Jainism to Saivaism.

Appar visited hundreds of Siva temples in Tamil Nadu and sang hymns in praise of the presiding deities. Some of the Nayanmars and Sambandar were his contemporaries and he has sung about them also. In one of his verses he has sung that Siva has Vishnu as part of him on the right side.

THIRUGNANA SAMBANDAR : He attained enlightenment at the age of three and started singing hymns. His father took him to more than 200 Siva temples about which he has sung in his hymns. By miraculously curing the disease of **Nedumaran**, the Pandian King, Sambandar converted him from Jainism to Saivaism. His life also had a miraculous end. At the age of 16 Sambandar got married and went to the Siva temple at Thirupuramkuntram near Madurai with his bride. He prayed for Moksha and it is said that Moksha was at once granted to him and to his wife.

SUNDARAMOORTHI : He lived in the 8th Century A.D. He became a devotee of Siva at the age of 16, visited Siva temples and sang hymns about them. Once he became blind but later he was cured by divine grace. He was a friend of Chera King, Cheraman Perumal and the Pallava

king, Nandivarman. Besides **Devaram** he has sung **Thiruthondar Thokai** which gives a brief account of the Nayanmars who lived earlier to him and also contemporary to him. Manicka vachagar was not found in the list and so he must have lived later than Sundaramoorthy.

MANICKA VACHAGAR : He is said to have lived in the 9th century A.D. Being well-learned he became the chief minister of Pandya King at the age of 16. He responded to the divine call and resigned his job. He visited all the Siva temples and sang hymns in praise of the deities. Finally he settled at Chidambaram and attained the feet of God at the age of 18. He has eomposed Thiruvachagam, Thirukovaiyar, Thirukatakam and Thiruvempavai. Thiruvempavai is being sung during the month of Margasirsha by Saivites in the early morning. The sweetness of the songs and their universal appeal have made the work so popular that the saying goes "Nothing can melt the heart of a man who is not melted by Thiruvachagam". Devotees can bask in the sunshine of God's grace by reciting his hymn.

The Saivite Nayanmars and Vaishnavite Alwars worked hard to drive out Jainism and Buddhism from Tamilnadu. They were the pillars of the Bhakti cult in Tamilnad.

D: Sir, what are the several sacred Saivite temples about which the Saiva saints have sung?

P: There are nearly 274 temples about which they have sung. In Sri Lanka there are two, in Pandia Nadu there are 22, in Cholanadu there are 190, in

Thondainadu there are 32, in Tuluvanadu there is one, in Kongunadu there are seven and in North India there are 5. It does not mean there are only 274 Siva temples. In every village where there is a Vishnu temple there will be also a Siva temple.

D: Sir, please tell me about some of the famous temples in the states of India.

P: Tamil Nadu abounds with temples. Kanchi is a town of temples. The Kumari temple at Cape Comerin, the Ranganatha temple at Sri Rangam, the Brahadeeswara temple at Tanjore, the Meenakshi temple at Madurai, the Nataraja temple at Chidambaram, the Padmanaba temple at Thiruvananthapuram, the Krishna temple at Guruvayur and the Rameswara temple at Sethu (Rameswaram) are all beautiful and very famous. To the **Tirupati Venkatesa Perumal Temple** millions of devotees come from all the states of India for worship. It is the most famous temple in India. The Ranganatha Temple in Karnataka, the Bhadrachala Temple in Andhra, the Poundrinath Temple in Maharashtra, the Somnath and Dwaraka Temples in Gujarat, the Nath (Krishna) Temple near Jaipur, the Kali Temple at Calcuta, the Jaganath Temple at Puri in Orissa, the Vishwanath Temple at Benares, the Krishna temple at Muttra in U.P., the Vaishnavi temple in Jammu, and the Badrinath Temple in the Himalayas attract thousands of worshippers. They have architectural excellence and attract foreign tourists.

D: Sir, when did **Adi Sankara** live? Kindly tell me about him.

P: **ADI SANKARA** was born in 788 A.D. at Kaladi in Kerala in Namboodri Brahmin family. He lost his father at the age of three. He was the only child to

his parents. After completing the study of Vedas he renounced worldly life at the early age of 12 with the permission of his mother and travelled northwards in search of a Guru, On the banks of the Narmada he came into contact with **Govindapada** and became his disciple. It is said that he went later to Badrinath in the Himalayas with his Guru Govindapada to meet **Gaudapada** who was the Guru of Govindapada.

It is also said that Sankara spent four years with Gaudapada to write commentaries on the Brahma Sutras, the **Upanishads** and the **Bhagavad Gita** to establih the Advaita Siddhanta. He has also composed 153 works out of which **Atmabodha, Soundaryalahari, Upadesasahasri, Viveka Chudamani,** are some of the important ones. He has written a commentary on **Vishnu Sahasranamam** enjoying to the full the auspicious qualities of Bhagavan Vishnu. He has advised his followers to worship Siva, Soorya, Sakti (Parvati), Vishnu, Vinayaka and Kumara because he knew that Nirguna Brahman cannot be worshipped. His philosophical poem **Baja Govindam** is in praise of Lord Krishna. Among the thousand names of Hari he was most attracted by the name of Govinda because it was the name of his Guru also.

Sankara held discussion with the Buddhist and Jain scholars and won them over to Hinduism. He had used the theory of Mayavada (super-imposition) to explain his Siddhanta Advaita. He travelled on foot from Kashmir to Cape Comorin and from Dwaraka to Assam.

Sankara established Mutts at **Sringeri** in Karnataka, at **Puri** in Orissa, at **Dwaraka** in Gujarat, at **Badrinath** in Uttar Pradesh and at **Kanchi** in Tamilnad. He preached about the superiority of Jnana Marga over Karma Marga. He attained Mukti at the early age of 32.

Adi Sankara has shown that he was also a devotee of Vishnu by composing the hymns. **Raghavashtakam, Ranganathashtakam, Hanumatpanchakam, Rama Bujanga Stothra, Achyuta Ashtakam, Govindashtakam, Shatpadi Stothram, Hari Charanashtakam, Krishnashtakam, Pandurangashtakam, Lakshmi Narasimha Stothram and others.**

D: Sir, it is really wonderful that Sankara has composed 153 works within a few years. Did Ramanuja appear after Sankara ? What is his achievement?

P: **RAMANUJA** : As the name implies he is considered to be an incarnation of Lakshmana, brother of Lord Rama. He was born at Sriperumbudur near Madras City in 1017 A.D. He studied Vedas and Sastras and got married at the age of 16. Then he went to Kanchi to study Vedanta under **Yadhavaprakasa** who was a Suddha Advaitist and of opinion that the universe is a form of God. He did not accept the Mayavada of Sankara. He was explaining a passage in Taitireeya Upanishad that "God is **Existence, Knowledge** and **Infinity**". Ramanuja objected to that and said "Brahman is endowed with the qualities of Truth, Knowledge and Infinity and that he is not a mere quality but a person". The preceptor was angry with Ramanuja for being presumptuous.

On another occasion in explaining a word 'Kapyasam', Yadava said, "The two eyes of that Golden Purusha were like two lotus flowers which are red like the nates of a monkey". On hearing this unbecoming, vulgar simile Ramanuja shed tears and said, "Kapih is Soorya who drinks water and the word Kapyasa means blossomed by the

sun and not the nates of a monkey as Sankara had commented. Yadava found in him a real and intelligent rival and asked him to go elsewhere for study.

Ramanuja continued his study at home. At Srirangam Yamunacharya was seriously ill. Having heard of Ramanuja he wanted to see him. He sent Manakal Nambi to bring him. But when Ramanuja arrived, Yamuna had attained the supreme abode of Narayana. Ramanuja could only see the blessed form of Yamunacharya.

Ramanuja returned to Kanchi and took to Sannyasa in a few months. His former Guru Yadhava himself became his disciple. Govinda, a cousin of Ramanuja, also became a Vaishnava and was named Embar.

Sri Ramanuja was brought to Srirangam Mutt by the Vaishnava devotees. He learnt the Rahasya thraya Mantras and their meaning from Thirukoshtiyur Nambi. But without his permission he called the pious people of low caste and preached the Mantras to them. When his Guru asked him why he did so, Ramanuja replied that by transgressing his behest he might go to hell but the thousands of pious people might attain the highest bliss. Thirukoshtiyur Nambi was pleased with the reply and embraced him.

Sri Ramanuja trained his disciples Embar, Kuresa and others. He himself received training from Alavandar's disciples - Periya Nambi, Thirumalai Nambi, Thiru koshtiyur Nambi, Thiru malaiyandan and Thiruvaranga perumalariar. He started writing Sri Bhashya, a commentary on Brahma Sutras, establishing the Visishtadvaita Siddhanta.

Ramanuja has written besides **Sri Bhashyam, Gita Bhashyam, Vedanta deepam, Vedanta Saram, Vedartha Sangraham Charanagati gatyam, Sri Rangagatyam, Vaikunta gatyam and Nityam.** All

these nine works shine as nine gems. He preached against the Mayavada of Sankara. Accompanied by 74 of his disciples he set out on a campaign of conquest for his Siddhanta.Thousands of people became his disciples. At the age of 79 he had to leave Srirangam because a staunch Saivite Chola king, **Kulothunga,** wanted to harm him.

Ramanuja went to Mysore where he converted the **Hoysala king Vithaladeva** from Jainism to Vaishnavaism. At his behest the king built a temple at Melkotai called Thirunarayanapuram. At the age of 103 Sri Ramanuja returned to Sri Rangam and carried on the preaching of Visishtadvaita. At the ripe age of 120 in 1137 Sri Ramanuja attained the lotus feet of Narayana. His other names are **Emberumanar, Bhashyakarar, Udaiyavar, Ponnady.** Sri Ramanuja was responsible for converting several kings and their subjects in South India from Jainism to Vaishnavaism.

Sri Vedanta Desikan has composed in Sanskrit **Yatiraja Saptati** in praise of Sri Ramanuja. **Manavalamamuni** has composed **Yatiraja Vimsati** in Sanskrit and **Aarti Prabandam** in Tamil. **Thiruvaranga Amudanar** has compoed **Ramanuja Nootru Antadi** in Tamil.

D: Revered Sir, I am thrilled to hear the account of Sri Ramanuja. When and where did Madhava chariar live? Kindly tell me about him also.

P: **VASUDEVA** was born at Udipi in Karnataka in 1238 A.D. He learnt Vedas and Sastras and got Sannyasa from Achuta Preksha. He was afterwards called **Aananda Theertha** and also **Madhavacharya.** His followers are called

Madhvas. He said that Jivatma is entirely different from Paramatma and at the time of Mukti, Jivatma goes to Vaikunta, the supreme abode of God Narayana, to do service to Him. He has established eight Mutts such as Utharadhi Mutt and Vyasaraja Mutt. At the age of 79 in 1317 A.D. he attained the lotus feet of Bhagavan Narayana.

D: From the 14th century onwards the Muslims began to establish their regimes. Did not Bhaktas appear on the scene to bear the torch of Hinduism?

P: Religious men realised that in the then existing social and political conditions, Hinduism could be saved only by Bhakti Marga involving the emotion of common people for the love of God. I shall give you a brief account of some of the saints.

JAYADEVA was born in Bengal in the 12th century. He has composed devotional songs called **Gita Govinda** which sings about the divine love of Radha and Krishna.

NAMADEVA (1270 - 1350) Namadeva was a tailor. He joined the Bhakti movement. He has sung devotional hymns in Hindi and Marathi. He was against caste distinctions and advocated reconciliation among various religions, and the uplift of women. Among his disciples were people from all castes and creeds. Many of his songs were incorporated in the Sikh scripture **Adi-Granth.**

RAMANANDA was the leader of the Bhakti movement in the North. He was a follower of the philosophy of **Ramanuja**. He lived in the 15th century. His disciples came from all castes and even Muslims were his disciples. His disciples included **Kabir and Raidas.** He was a Vaish-

nava who worshipped Rama and Sita.

KABIR (1425 - 1518 A.D.) He was born in a Hindu family but was brought up by a Muslim weaver. Kabir learned Hindu philosophy from his Guru Ramananda. He never gave up his profession as a weaver. He composed devotional songs and said that the basic tenets of Hinduism and Islam were the same. He was against the superstitions of both Hindus and Muslims. He said that the only one Supreme Being was called by several names, Rahim, Ram and Govind. He said that a devotee needed no temple, no mosque and no idol. God was within everybody and he could be worshipped. Guru Nanak was Kabir's disciple.

CHAITANYA (1486 - 1534) He was born in a Brahmin family in Bengal. At the age of 18 he was married. He started life as a teacher, but soon left his profession obeying his inner spiritual call. He met **Iswarpuri** a Vaishnava Saint at Gaya and was initiated by him into the Bhakti cult. He returned to Bengal at the age of 23 and spent his time in singing songs in praise of Lord Krishna. He had disciples from people of all castes and religions. He undertook a pilgrimage throughout India and preached Bhakti cult. At Thiruvananda puram he got a copy of Krishna Karnamrutham sung by **Bilvamangala** and wrote a commentary on it. He spent his last 18 years at Puri Jagannath.

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu was influenced by Jayadeva's Gita Govinda. He advocated Prapatti or the doctrine of self-surrender to God. Krishna was his favourite God. His philosophy was Bheda-Abheda (similarity and difference) He said both souls and God had similarity in having knowledge. But the knowledge of souls was less and that of God was infinite.

Chaitanya said that devotion to God can be shown in several ways by **Shanti** or quite contemplation, by

Dasya or service to God, by **Sakhya** or friendly lovē, by **Vatsalya** or the love of a parent for the child and by **Madhurya** or the love of a lover. Muslims also became his disciples. His Vaishnava Bhakti cult spread to Assam and Manipur.

VALLABHACHARYA (1479 - 1531 A.D.) He was a contemporary of Sri Chaitanya. He was born to Telugu parents at Vatrap in Madhya Pradesh. He was a great exponent of Krishna cult. He has written a commentary on Vedanta Sutras, Siddhanta Rahasya and Subhodhini. He spent his days at Brindaban. His philosophy is similar to that of Ramanuja. He says that his philosophy is **Suddha Advaita** or **Pure Monism** because he is not using the **Maya Theory.** He says Brahmam cannot be afflicted by Maya or ignorance. He says like Ramanuja that souls and universe form the body of God. The world came into existence from 'Sat' and souls from' Chit' of the unmanifested Avyakta state of Akshar Brahman, like sparks from burning fuel (Mundaka Upanishad). So souls also have Sat (existence) Chit (Knowledge) and **anandam** (bliss) of Brahmam (God).

Vallabha built a Krishna temple at a place 50 K.M. from Udaipur. It is called **Nath-Dwara**. Vallabha's descendents called **'Goswamis'** are in charge of it. His Bhakti philosophy is also called Pushti Marga. Pushti is God's grace. His followers must have **Panchasamskara (Nama etc)** like Ramanuja's Vaishnavites. His followers are in Assam, Bengal, Gujarat and Rajasthan. It was **Krishnadeva Raya** who gave him the title **Acharya** in recognition of his learning. The Vaishnava College and school in Madras were started by his followers. Soordas and Meerabai belonged to his Bhakti cult.

TULASIDAS (1532 - 1623 A.D.) It is said that Tulasidas was doting on his wife like Bilvamangla, the

author of Krishna Karnamrudham, who doted on Chintamani. His wife told him that he could attain the highest state if only he showed his love to God. Tulsidas went to Benaras and studied Sanskrit and Hindu scriptures. As common people did not understand Valmiki's Ramayana in Sanskrit, he wrote the Ramayana in Hindi verses. In Valmiki's Ramayana Sita had to pass through the ordeal of fire. Tulasidas left it as the incident would not add to the glory of Rama.

D: Sir, I have heard there were in Maharashtra Samartha Ramadas, Jnaneswara and other saints. Kindly tell me about them.

P: **JNANESWARA** was the founder of the mystic school in Maharashtra His great work is **Jnaneswari** which is an elaborate commentary in Marathi verses about Bhagavad Gita. His followers were **Ekanath, Tukaram, Samartha Ramadas** and others.

EKANATH : He was a Brahmin devotee. His Bhagavada songs are sung in the temple of **Pandaripur.** He pased away in 1608 A.D.

TUKARAM : He was a contemporary of Sivaji. His songs speak of his boundless devotion to God and his absolute self-surrender to Him. Sivaji sought him as his Guru but Tukaram directed him to Samartha Ramadas.

SAMARTHA RAMADAS : He was born in 1608 A.D. He was 20 years older

than Sivaji. He was a great devotee of Rama and was considered as an incarnation of Hanuman. At the age of 12 his marriage was arranged but Ramadas slipped away from home and went to **Panchavadi** on the banks of the river Godavari. There he did penance for 12 years. During the next 12 years he went on a pilgrimage all over India. While he was at Badrinath, he decided to have renunciation and became a Sannyasi. As he could accomplish whatever he desired he was called 'Samartha Ramadas'. He had wonderful yogic powers. He established his Aasram at **Chabel** on the banks of the river Krishna and spread the gospel of Bhakti.

Most important among his works are the **Ramayana** and the **Dasabhoda.**

Ramadas was the Guru and chief adviser of Sivaji and urged him to defeat the enemies of Hinduism. Sivaji placed a palm leaf in the begging bowl of the Sannyasi Ramadas. In it was written that Sivaji had made over his kingdom to him as a gift. Ramadas advised him to act as the servant of Sri Rama. Sivaji from that day chose the saffron coloured cloth for his dress. Ramadas passed away a year after the death of Sivaji.

D: Sir, kindly tell me about Meera Bai.

P: **MEERA BAI** lived from 1547 A.D. to 1614 A.D. She was the daughter of **Raja Ratan Singh** of Khurki in **Mewar.** Even as a child of four she began to worship the image of Giridhara Krishna brought to her house by a Sannyasi. She regarded Giridhara Krishna as her husband. But at the age of eight inspite of her protests she was married to **Prince Bhoja,** son of **Maharana Pratap** of **Chittoor.** In her husband's house a shrine was built for Giridhara Krishna and she

continused to worship Him, Her husband persecuted her but just like Prahalada she came out unscathed out of the ordeal. In one of her songs Meera says, "The Rana sent a cup of poison; Meera drank it and laughed". She received initiation from **Saint Raidas. Emperor Akbar** himself came to her in disguise in 1568 along with poet **Tansen** to hear her devotional songs. He offered a diamond necklace to adorn the idol of Krishna. Meera went to Brindavan in 1590 and there she was honoured by saints. Then she went to Dwaraka and spent her days singing the glory of Krishna in the company of devotees until Lord Krishna took her away to his celestial abode. Meera's devotional songs have a thrilling effect on listeners.

D: Sir, were there not saints at this period in South India?

P: Saints like **Thiagaraja** in Tamil Nadu, **Purandharadas, Kanagadas** and **Vijayadas** in Karnataka sang devotional songs set to music and led the people along the path of Bhakti.

SRI RAGHAVENDRA SWAMI - (1624 - 1671) This famous Madhva saint belongs to the 17th century. He has his tomb in **Manthralaya** on the banks of the **Tungabhadra**. He had to his credit 23 works on Dvaita philosophy and commentaries on philosophical works of Vedas. His saintliness was recognised by **Sir Thomas Munro** who was sent to Manthralaya to enquire about the endowment of the village. It was proposed by the East India Company to take the village back. The village was endowed by a Muslim governor of Adoni. The Madras District Gazetteer reprinted in 1916 says thus: "Sri Raghavendra Swami emerged from his Samadhi **(Brindavan)** in his

saffron robes and spoke to **Sir Thomas Munro** in English. Munro quashed the proposal to take back the endowment of the village".

D: Sir, kindly tell me about the famous devotees of Muruga.

P: **POET NAKIRAR** belonged to the third and last Tamil Sanga period. He has sung in Thiru Murugatrupadai, the six places in Tamilnad where Muruga blesses people in temples raised for Him.

POET ARUNAGIRI was born at Thiruvannamalai in Tamilnad. He was a contemporary of Vedanta Desikan. He has composed melodious songs on Muruga. Thirupugazh, Kandar Alankaram and Kandar Anubhudi are some among them.

KUMARA GURURPARAR : He was born at Srivaikundam in Tamilnad. He was dumb till his fifth year. Then he was taken to the temple of Muruga at Thiruchendur where he got his voice by the grace of Muruga. He has sung Kandar Kalivenba, Madurai Kalampakam, Pillai Tamil, Sahalakala Valli and other songs. He built a Saivite Mutt at Benaras and spread the Saiva cult.

D: Sir, I am sure the biographies of Saints and preceptors will do good to every one and enhance the devotion to God.

P: They will certainly do good. Unable to bear the miseries in life some people may think that life is not worth living. The study of the biographies of saints will provide inspiration and strength to them. The saints possessed great capacity for detachment, patience and submission to the will of God. The life of Manickavachagar and Thiagaraja will illustrate this truth.

13. HINDUISM IN OTHER COUNTRIES

D: Dear Sir, did Hindus colonise other countries?

P: Scholars are of opinion that the Vedic religion was existent all over the world. The **Maya civilization** in Mexico 3000 years ago was said to be close to that of the Hindus. The big buildings built there at that time and which are discovered now serve as evidences. The idols of Vinayaka are also said to be found there. The civilization of **Incas** existed in Peru of South America 3000 years ago. They were Sun worshippers. The native tribes even now worship the Sun. Inan means Sun in Sanskrit also. The ruined buildings there are cited as evidence. The Incas, it is said, have gone from India. Indians in the past went to West Asia, East Indies, Combodia, Vietnam, Siam, Mongolia, China and other countries to spread their culture.

D: Dear Sir, did Hindus go to **Western Asia** and **Central Asia?**

P: Ruined Hindu temples and idols are found in Turkistan, Egypt and Asia minor. Hindus were in Iraq (Mesopatomia) in the 3rd century A.D. and Hindu temples were built. When Baghdad became the centre of Islam in the 8th century Hindu scholars and doctors were invited there. **Panchatantra** fables, **Charaka Samhita** in medicine, **Brahma Siddhanta** of Brahmagupta in Mathematics were translated into Arabic. The Arabs learnt **Algebra, Geometry, Decimals and Trignometry** (Thirikonamithi) from the Indians. The Europeans learnt them from the Arabs.

The Mauriyas ruled over Afghanistan and Baluchistan. Hindu culture had spread there and also Buddhism. Khotan in Eastern Turkistan was the centre of Buddhism and scholars from China came there to study Sanskrit and Buddhism. Indian culture was prevalent there till the 8th century A.D.

D: Dear Sir, when did Indians colonise **Indonesia?**

P: The Indian culture was prevalent in **Java** from the 2nd century A.D. to 15th century A.D. Hindu merchants went there for trade and later on princes went there to carve out their kingdoms. With them went Hindu missionaries to spread their religion. Hindus from Kalinga (Orissa) and Tamilnadu settled there. In the 6th century **King Sanjaya** built temples for Siva and Agastya. At **Brahmapana** in Central Java several temples are existent even now with idols of Siva, Durga, Vishnu and Ganesa. Architecture and painting have themes from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. The puppet plays of Java have themes from the Ramayana. In the 5th century A.D. a Kashmiri prince went to Java to spread Buddhism.

At **Bhorapudur** there are temples for Buddha and Hindu gods. They were built by **Sailendra King** who ruled in the 8th century A.D. over Java, Bali, Sumatra, Borneo (Varunadiv) and Malay peninsula (Kadaram). **Srivijaya** ruled over **Sumatra** called **Swarnadiv** in the 7th century A.D. **Kaundinya Kula** king ruled over **Bali** in 9th century A.D. Hindus are still there though the other islands of East Indies were invaded by Muslim Arabs and the people were converted to their religion. The culture there is

still Hindu culture. Even their Airways is named **Garuda Airways**. Sanskrit words form a large part of their language.

King Mula Varman of Varunadiv (Borneo) performed a sacrifice. Pillars are found in Borneo with Sanskrit edicts carved on them. The Hindus colonised it in the 4th century A.D.

D: Dear Sir, when did Indians go to **Combodia**?

P: In Cambodia also called **Kambojee,** a Brahmin named **Kaundinya** established a Kingdom in the 1st century A.D. His descendants ruled the country till the 14th century A.D. Both Saivaism and Vaishnavaism were patronised by the Kings. Kings **Balavarman, Mahendra Varman, Jaya Varman** and others ruled here.

King **Surya Varma II** (1113 - 1152) built **Angkorvat,** a big temple for Lord Vishnu. It is considered to be one of the wonders of the world. The roofed gallery is profusely decorated with sculptures of exquisite beauty. The shrine stands on the top of a terraced structure. There are innumerable towers and spires. The front tower is 65 metres high. The capital **Angkortom** was built by **King Jayavarman.** Inscriptions are carved here in Sanskrit Kavya style and show knowledge of Hindu scriptures and philosophy. **Raghuvamsa** of **Kalidasa, Panini's Grammar** and works of **Patanjali, Manu** and **Susruta** were studied here. The name of the river **Mekong** is only the corrupt name of **Mahaganga.**

D: Dear Sir, when did Indians settle in **Sri Lanka**?

P: According to **Mahavamsa,** the History of Sri Lanka, **Prince Vijaya** from Kalinga (Orissa) went there and ruled it. The Pali language, a

branch of Sanskrit, was spoken in North India. The Singhala language is akin to it. **King Devapriya**, a contemporary of King Asoka, built a Bouddha Mutt at Anuradhapura. **Raja Raja Chola** conquered north and east parts of Sri Lanka and built Saiva temples there. During the British regime hard-working Indians were settled in Central Lanka to work in tea plantations.

D: Dear sir, when did Indians settle in Vietnam?

P: In **Champa** called **Vietnam** or **Annam** South Indians settled there in the 2nd century A.D. Annam had 3 provinces **Amaravathi, Vijaya** and **Panduranga**. Several temples are found there. The temples of Dong Duong are Buddhist and those of Mecon and Ponnagar are Saivite. **King Bhadravarma** built a Siva temple at Meeson. The temple architecture is similar to temples at Kanchi. **King Indra Varma III** who ruled here in 910 A.D. was proficient in Sanskrit, Vedanta and Sanskrit Kavya. Sanskrit was the official language of the Kingdom.

D: Dear Sir, when did Indians go to **Thailand**?

P: Hindu culture and civilisation spread to **Thailand** from 2nd century onwards. Cities and provinces got Indian names such as Gandhara, Mithila, Kausambi. Idols of Siva, Vishnu and Buddha are still worshipped there. The Kings have Indian names like Rama. Sanskrit words form fifty percent of their language. Hindu Vedas and Dharma Sastras are still being learnt and Hindu festivals are even now observed there. In the month of Margasirsha Thiruvempavai and Thirupavai are being recited here. Their laws are based on Hindu Dharma Sastras.

D: Dear Sir, did Indians colonise **Burma**?

P: Hindus had contact with **Burma** called **Swarna Bhumi** for more than 3000 years. A Hindu kingdom **Srikshetra** was founded there. The biggest river in Burma is named as **Irawadhi** which is the name of Indira's white elephant, because white elephants are found in Burma. Sanskrit and Pali inscriptions are found there. The laws of Burma were codified from the works of **Yagnavalkya** and **Parasara.** There were a number of Hindu kingdoms in Arakan and Malay peninsula. The language, literature, religion and also social and political institutions were transplanted there from India. The art and architecture were inspired and modelled after the finest creations of Indian art. India can be proud that her cultural and religious penetration by missionaries and others were only peaceful and not by force of arms.

D: Did Indians go to **China, Tibet** and **Japan?**

P: In the 6th century A.D **Dharma Rakshaka** and **Kasyappa** spread Buddhism in China. **Bodhidharma** from South India went to China in 526 A.D. **Paramartha** went there in 546 A.D. and translated 70 Buddhist texts into Chinese. Hindu temples have been discovered in South East China. As Buddhism is only a branch of Hinduism, Hindus also went there with the Buddhists in the 1st century A.D. They were patronised by the rulers. In the 6th century the royal family followed Hinduism for two generations. One ruler was called **Narayana** and another **Siva dasa.** Even

now old people visit temples which contain idols of Buddha and HIndu gods.

The ruler of **Tibet** became a Buddhist in the 7th century A.D. A number of temples and monasteries were built there and Hindu Dharma Sastras were translated into Tibetan language.

Bodhisena taught Dharma Sastras in **Japan** during 736-760 A.D. Hindu Sastras were learnt in **Korea** and **Mongolia.**

D: Dear Sir, is Hinduism still practised in these countries?

P: Though in **Indonesia** and **Malaysia** people have been forced to embrace Islam, Hindu culture is still there. In **Mauritius** and **Fiji** Islands Hindus form more than 50% of the population. Hindus have settled in **South Africa, Guiana, Hawai, New York** and **Sanfrancisco**. They have built temples there for their worship.

14. SCIENCE AND RELIGION

D: Sir, is science opposed to religion?

P: Science is not antagonistic to religion. Science is the systematic knowledge which we obtain through observation, experiment and deduction of natural phenomena in this Universe. We are able to discover only a few wonders of Nature and the laws of Nature that we discover are liable to be changed or modified by further discoveries in future. God is said to be the repository of knowledge. **Taiteeriya Upanishad** says, Brahma is Sathyam, Jnanam, Anantham (Truth, knowledge and infinity).

Aryabatta and **Varahamitira** discovered that the earth and the heavenly bodies are spheres and brought out their treatises on astronomy. They calculated when exactly, the eclipses occur. In the 16th century **Galileo**, the Italian Scientist, said that the world is a sphere. The Christian priests accused him of being a wizard and had him burnt. The westerners say that **Copernicus** discovered in 16th century that the world is a sphere but Indian scientists had discovered this truth even before the birth of Christ. The discoveries of the wonders of Nature only make us all the more grateful to God.

D: Sir, kindly explain this.

P: The universe must have been created by a highly intelligent being. There are several millions of galaxies in this universe and each galaxy has several millions of stars. Each star is burning like our Sun. Our Sun belongs to the galaxy, **Milky way**, which has about 2000 million stars extending over 1000 light years. A light year is about 9.46×10^{12} K.M. Each star must have planets and the planets may have moons. Our Earth has one moon; Mars has 2 moons; Jupiter has 16 moons; Saturn has 20 moons; Uranus has 15 moons and Neptune has 8 moons. The moons can be seen only by powerful telescopes.

The Mars is the nearest planet to our Earth and it is at a distance of 78 million K.M. from the earth. Mercury is the nearest planet to the Sun and it is 58.5 million K.M. from the Sun.The Venus is 108×10^6K.M; the Earth is 150×10^6K.M.; the Mars is 228×10^6K.M.;the

Jupiter is $780 x 10^6$K.M ; the Saturn is $1431 x 10^6$K.M.; the Uranus is $2880 x 10^6$K.M.; the Neptune is $4509 x 10^6$K.M , and Pluto is $5928 x 10^6$K.M from the sun.

The Sun is found to rotate once in 28 days from an observation of the sun's spots. It also revolves about the centre of the **Milky Way.** The Sun is 13 lakh times bigger than the Earth. Its diameter is 1.3 million K.M. The **Jupiter** is the biggest planet. The nearest star to our Sun is **Alpha Centauri** which is 4.3 light years away from the Sun. One of the planets may have living beings. The planets of the Sun other than our Earth cannot have living beings as the temperature in them is too high or too low and there is neither air nor water in them.

The Earth rotates on its axis at 1600 K.M. per hour. If it should rotate at 160 K.M. per hour, the days and nights will be ten times longer. The temperature in the day time will be so high that plants and living beings will be burnt. The nights will be very cold.

The temperature on the surface of the sun is 6600 ° c but at the core the temperature may be 100 million degree centigrade. The Sun is far away but if it were nearer and should give even 11/2 times more heat, we will be burnt.

The earth rotates inclined at 231/2 ° to its axis. If there is no inclination, the water vapour will go due North and South and become ice. There will be no monsoons bringing rain to us. If the moon were nearer, the tides will rise so high that the earth will be submerged by the sea-water.

Man's brain is said to contain billion

nerve-cells and every cell has about 10 to 15 nerve fibres to be connected to other neighbouring cells. It is a wonder how the brain has the faculties of memory, recall, intelligence and reasoning power. Every living cell has **Chromosomes**. How do they possess distinctive hereditary characteristics? It is the work of all-powerful sentient being called God.

D: The sun is only a burning object. Why should people worship it as a God? How does it continue to burn?

P: The Sun is only a burning sphere. The nine planets Earth, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Venus, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune and Pluto only reflect sun's light. The sun is an atomic fusion reactor. Every minute 600 million tons of hydrogen atoms in it fuse into Helium atoms and during fusion .7% of matter is converted into huge amount of energy according to **Einstein's equation $E = MC^2$** where E is the amount of energy produced, M is mass in grams and C is the Velocity of light in centimetres. It is this energy that we get as heat and light.

It is said that the Sun contains 99.9% of the matter contained in the solar system with all the planets and satellites. The light travels at 3 lakh kilometers per second from the sun and reaches us in 9 minutes. It is by sun's heat that sea-water evaporates and we get good water from rains. Plants prepare food for us making use of the Sun's light energy. **Chandogya Upanishad** says that it is God who controls it from within , So when we worship the sun, we only worship Soorya Narayana God in it to show our gratitude.

D: The planets revolve only due to the force of gravity in Nature.

P: Yes, but it is God who has made this gravitational law.

D: Is it not superstistition to worship planets?

P: The rays that are reflected by planets may be different. Indian astronomers like **Varahamihira** have stated that these rays from planets have special characteristics. They have formulated the science of Astrology.

D: Sir, how can the rays from planets which are far away affect us?

P: The sun's rays affect us. There are tides on the New Moon day and Full Moon day. Some astrologers predict coming events and also tell us of past events in our lives. Some devotees are said to cure disease by mere touch. We can not explain these phenomena except by saying that they are due to telepathy or mesmerism or **clairvoyance** or occult powers. But such a power is only divine power obtained from God by some devotees.

D: We discover facts in science by perception, reasoning and inference. But why can not we apply these methods to religion?

P: Salt dissolves in water. We cannot see the salt in the water. It has disappeared within it. Perception does not help us. We are deceived by mirage. **Inference** and **perception** do not help us. Science has not revealed everything in Nature. Nature is so vast and unfathomable. Our mental power is vast and the sages through meditation and Yogic power have discovered spiritual truths.

D: Our religion says that God is not only the **efficient** cause but also the **material cause** of the world. How can God become world which is matter?

P: **Einstein,** a great scientist, has said that matter can be converted into energy and energy into matter. If God possesses infinite energy he can convert a part of it into matter also.

D: Will this world be destroyed at the end of this **Kaliyuga?**

P: During the **Huge Deluge** ({Pralaya) at the end of Kaliyuga the Earth may be covered by sea-water destroying all living beings. The flood may subside later and another cycle of Yugas may start.

D: Sir, how can we attain Siddhis or mental powers by meditation?

P: Man has **waking state, dream and dreamless sleep.** During sleep mind and some of the organs in the body get rest. During meditation one does not lose consciousness but some of the organs get rest as in dreamless sleep. Heart beat and blood pressure decrease; breathing becomes slow; waste materials are produced less in the body; meditation increases mental power. We can not sleep if we desire but during transcendental meditation we can make the organs rest as in dreamless sleep. Our Indian Yogis have gone to America to teach transcendental meditation, the value of which has been greatly realised by Americans.

One who practises meditation for a long time goes into Samadhi state. In this state it is said one can be without food and a Yogi can even stop his heart-beat. Though it is not possible

for ordinary people to attain this state, we can improve our mental power by meditating for some time in the morning and in the evening. A great doctor acknowledged to be an expert in neurology says that **even a genius uses only one tenth of his mental power and by meditation the mental power is increased.** If we control our thoughts and direct the thoughts to God only and meditate for some time, our mental power is sure to be increased.

D: Sir, I have read that even western scientists like Einstein were devotees of God.

P: Yes. Scientists like **Sir James Jeans** and **Einstein** were spiritualists. Einstein said that he got solace and inspiration from the study of Bhagavad Gita and Upanishads. He said, **"Science without religion is lame. Religion without science is blind. Everyone who is seriously involved in the pursuit of science becomes convinced that a spirit is manifest in the laws of the Universe - a spirit vastly superior to that of man and one in the face of which we with our modest power must feel humble".**

The Astronauts who went to the moon 3 lakhs kilometres away in the sky started only after saying their prayers. They believed there is an omnipotent being called God which controls the actions of men. So science only helps us to discover the mysteries of God's creation. There is no antagonism between Science and Religion They are complementary to each other.

D: Sir, please explain how they are complementary?

P: Science provides us with all ameneties for our bodily comforts. But man does not live by bread alone. He has a soul. He requires food to feed the soul and should take care of its needs. Spiritual life gives us peace of mind and the right code of conduct for a harmonious life. Without spiritual and moral values man's life will be no better than that of a beast. Science may give weapons of destruction but it is morality and religion that can save the world.

Science also has helped to weed out superstitions from religious practices, Science follows the path of reason and intelligence, and religion travels along the road of faith and belief. Science is objective but religion is subjective. Both aim at the discovery of truth. Scientific law is discovered through reason based on sense data. Spiritual law is discovered through introspection acquired through self-control, non-attachment, contemplation and transcendental meditation. There are more things in Heaven and on earth than our science can dream of. Truth has been discovered in the state of Samadhi or transcendental meditation. So both science and religion are complementary to each other.

): Sir, does religion accept Darwin's theory of evolution?

: The Christian church was against it as the Bible said mankind came from Adam and Eve. Our position is that the evolution is the will of God. The **Avatars of Vishnu** beginning from fish

which is the creature of water, then tortoise, the creature on land and in water, then the boar, then Narasimha who was half-beast and half-man, and Vamana the dwarf are according to this theory. But according to **Swami Vivekananda** evolution is not due to survival of the fittest. The soul has inherent power to take these forms and the manifestation depends upon Karma, time and place.

D: Sir, what is **the origin of this universe** according to the scientists?

P: Scientists say that stars and planets came into existence on account of a **Big Bang.** Before that there was only cosmic energy. You know that **Dr. Einstein** has said that energy can be converted into matter and matter into energy on certain conditions. What the Indian sages have said is that this Big Bang was made by God Himself. God is omnipotent and has infinite energy. **Purusha suktam says 'Pathosya Viswa Bhoodani'.** A part of God's energy is converted into this universe.

15. NATIONAL INTEGRATION

D: Sir, India is a land of several races, languages, culture and castes. Will not such differences be a bar to integration?

P: **National integration has been defined "as a phychological and educational process involving the development of the feeling of unity in the minds of the people, a sense of common citizenship and a feeling of loyalty to the nation".** True, there are differences but our efforts should be to find **unity in diversity.**

In the **Ramayana** Rama accepted **Guha** the hunter, **Vibishana** the Rakshasa and **Sugreeva** the monkey as his brothers. We have various organs in our body. Each has a definite function of its own. Only if they work harmoniously, life will be pleasant. If they do not cooperate but confront one another, life will be wretched.

Several kinds of flowers bloom in a big garden. They are different in colour, size, scent and beauty. The different creeds are several paths to the same destination. Paths are different but the destination is the same. A big river has steps at different places. Anyone can get water using a particular flight of steps. Similarly man can reach God by following any religion.
Lord Krishna says in **Bhagavad Gita, (IV-11)** thus:

Howsoever men approach me,
even so do I accept them;
whatever path they choose is mine".

Ramalinga Swamy, Asoka, Sri Ramakrishna and Gandhiji have preached toleration towards other religions and sects.

D: What has Asoka said?

P: **King Asoka** was a zealous Buddhist. But he said that no religion had a monopoly of truth or virtue and there were good aspects in every religion. One of his rock edicts proclaims thus: **His majesty the king shows reverence to the devotees of all religions; a man**

must have reverance for his own religion and must not disparage that of another man. By thus acting a man exalts his own religion and at the same time does service to the people of other religions".

This virtue of religious toleration has not been proclaimed anywhere in the world as in India. Hindus have been very tolerent and a Gujarati Hindu king built even mosques for Muslims. But this attitude must be reciprocated by people of other religions also.

D: Sir, what did Sri Ramalingaswamy and Sri Ramakrishna say?

P: **Ramalingaswamy** advocated the worship of Jothi or light and said that all religions deserve our reverence for one reason or another. **Bhagavan Ramakrishna** practised the tenets of every religion and said that he got into the presence of God through those religions. But he advised everyone to follow one's own religion.

D: What has Gandhiji done for religious toleration?

P: **Gandhiji**, the father of our nation, has obtained freedom for our country from foreign yoke through non-violence and spiritual force. He preached Hindu-Muslim unity and in his daily public prayers passages from the Koran, the Bhagavad Gita, the Bible and the Zenda Avesta were recited.

D: In south India were the Vaishnavites quarelling with Saivites in the past?

P: Not at all. Saivite kings built temples for Vishnu. Vaïshnavite kings built temples for Siva. Alwars and Saivite Nayanmars have sung

that Siva is on the right side of Vishnu in his body, meaning thereby that both are one and the same God. Several temples for Siva have temples for Vishnu also within their compounds and vice versa.

D: So there is unity in spite of diversity.

P: Certainly. There is an underlying truth in all religions. There is only one God who is called by different names. "All roads lead to Rome". You may have read the story of blind men and an elephant. One of them touching the ears said that the elephant was like a fan. Another touched the leg and said that the elephant was like a tree. The third touched the stomach and said that the elephant was like a wall. The fourth touched the trunk and said that the elephant was like a snake. The fifth touched the tail and said that the elephant was like a rope. Each sect stresses certain aspect while the truth embraces all these aspects. It will be good if people of one religion join in the celebration of festivals of other religions to promote integration.

Let us always remember **Nehruji's** words :

We are citizens of no mean country.
We are proud of the land of our birth,
our culture and our traditions.
India is a cultural unity amidst diversity.
Let us seek wisdom, knowledge,
friendship and comradeship and
cooperate with others in the common tasks for
the advancement of our country".

D: Sir, what should be done to prevent communal riots and promote national integration?

P: Politicians should not interfere with matters which are entirely religious. They play the communal card only to get personal benefit or votes in election. It is against the interest of the nation.

(2) Caste based politics has done immense harm to the society. Votes should not be canvassed on the basis of caste or religion. Communal discard will threaten the fabric of national unity if it is left to grow and not nipped in the bud.

(3) Every citizen should think that he or she is an Indian first and that religion is a private affair between man and God. One should not have tendency to think only of one's own caste, creed, religion, tribe or state in a large country of diversity like ours, but should work for the common good.

(4) Unsocial elements resort to large scale vandalism, loot, arson and murder to get benefit materially. They should be checked and punished.

(5) We should foster the concept and spread the message of National Integration in meetings, schools, colleges, institutions, textbooks, radio, television, handbills and religious congregations. Children should be taught in schools that they form integral constituents of the nation what ever creed or caste they belong to.

(6) Reservation in the field of employment and education on the basis of caste or creed leads to friction and ill-will. Poverty with merit should be the criterion. Backwardness

should be assessed on the basis of economic condition of a family.

(7) Conversion to other religions should be banned as this sows discard between one community and another. Foreign missionaries should be prevented from converting to their religion the poor, ignorant villagers. This may lead to disloyalty to the country. Foreign money for conversions should be banned as this helps to widen the divisions.

(8) Communities may be encouraged to take part in the festivals of other communities.

(9) Religious processions should not be allowed through the locality of other communities. Prayers of other communities should not be disturbed.

(10) Secularism does not mean anti-religion. Tenets of all religions may be explained to students in moral instruction classes to stress the fact that all religions teach peace, truth, honesty, morality, brotherhood, selfless service to the needy and harmony among all communities.

(11) Economic disparity among communities breeds discard and envy. The weak and the needy should be helped to avoid poverty. Family planning should be carried out in all religious communities without exception. There will be only discard if it is not carried out in some religious communities allowing it to multiply in geometrical proportions. It will be good to have a common code of laws for all.

(12) Tourism promotes National Integration. North Indians come on pilgrimage to Rameswaram and South Indians go to Benares

and other holy places. This will enable people to study the customs of people in other parts and integrate.

(13) Politics should be divorced from religion. Everyone should think that he or she is a citizen of India and not in terms of community or caste.

(14) The role of common language and common script is an important factor inNational Integration. Now both English and Hindi can be learnt by all besides the regional language.

(15) The Central and State governments should fight against communal frenzy, linguistic chauvinism, religious bigotry, regional fanaticism, caste barriers and economic inequalities which are the sources for disintegration.

16. OUR CULTURAL HERITAGE

D: Sir, what is culture and what is heritage?

P: **Culture** is trained and refined state of understanding, conduct and tastes. **Heritage** is what is inherited. **Civilization** is the advanced state of refinement in food, dress, vehicles, houses, cities and such other external and material requirements, **Kulapathy K.M. Munshi** says thus in his **Foundations of Indian Culture:**

"The word culture is widely misunderstood. Dance, music and jazz are not culture. They are often characterised by want of culture. It is the sum total of values expressed

through art, religion, literature, social institutions and behaviour. Culture comes from the past, adjusts itself to the present and moves forward. Culture is like a flowing stream. The continuity expresses itself in common traditions, in norms of conduct and in common institutions".

D: Sir, kindly enlighten me about our culture.

P: This is a vast subject. But I shall deal with what every youngman and woman should know. Indian culture has a speciality of its own. It has vital influences on our way of life.

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru says thus in his **Discovery of India :**

"It is wonderful to think of the long range and continuity of Indian Culture right from the dawn of history through long ages down to us. We are proud to think that we are heirs to this great culture. It has withstood shocks of external aggression unlike Roman, Greek and Assyrian cultures. India will continue as of old and her store of wisdom will help her to hold on to what is true, beautiful and good in this hard, vindictive, aspiring world. The invaders adopted our culture derived from our philosophy, religion, literature and art. The poor peasants in our village in spite of their poverty are steeped in our culture".

Dharma or right conduct is the basis of our way of living. Our cultural heritage is derived from the **Vedas, Dharma codes, Upanishads** and **Epics. Rama** has been descibed to us as an

ideal man, Bharata and Lakshmana as ideal brothers, **Sita and Savithri** as ideal women, **Karna** as an ideal charity-giver, **Harichandra** as one who stuck to truth in spite of calamities in life, the **Pandavas** as men of good conduct and bravery and **Hanuman** as an ideal devotee. The lives of these greatmen show us the beacon light to make our lives sublime and guide us along the right path whenever we have problems in our own life's journey.

Our Itihasas-the **Ramayana** and the **Mahabharatha** - are treasures of knowledge and experience. From our moral stories, **Bhagavadham** and other Puranas we learn loyalty, bravery, gratitude, chastity, love, sacrifice, non-violence, patriotism, generosity, service to society, mental purity and other traits and righteous conduct. Non-violence is to be observed generally but soldiers are exempt from it as they have to fight in defence of their country and to protect its borders.

Indians except Sannyasis regard begging as a disgrace. They honour learned men, show hospitality to deserving people, work for the elevation of the weak and the depressed people in society and show tolerance to people of other religions, races or castes.

We can find people leading two kinds of life. Most of the people follow the ordinary Dharmic life of righteous conduct. They work and earn by honest means, enjoy life and perform the duties prescribed by our Sastras. Five kinds of duties

or**Pancha yagnas** are prescribed for everyone. They are worship of God (**Deva yagna**), worship of ancestors (**Pitr yagna**), studying scriptures (**Rishi yagna**), helping poor people with alms (**Manusha yagna**), and feeding birds and animals (**Bhoota yagna**). Duties are prescribed for students, married men and women.

The people who pursue wealth alone follow **Preyus or pravrithi Marga.** The other class of people who are relatively few in number follow **Sreyus** or **Nivrithi Marga** or a life of detachment from worldly desires. As a matter of fact this way of life is prescribed in the fourth and last stage of Asrama for everyone so that people may lead an intensely spiritual life and try to get release from the cycle of birth and death. Earthly pleasure being transient, man should aim at eternal bliss and strive for attaining it.

D: Sir, kindly tell me about the duties of a student.

P: Our **Taiteeriya Upanishad** in Siksha Valli prescribes some duties for students. A student should pray for wisdom, for perfect health, for ability to talk in a pleasing manner, for ability to understand, for company of virtuous people, for fame, for greatness and purity of body and mind. The student must sit at the feet of the preceptor and learn. He should show him the greatest respect. He must chew the cud of what he has learnt and assimilate them.

A student should regard women as mothers and sisters. He should avoid pan, betel, scents, non-vegetarian food, cigarettes, harmful drugs, untruth, anger, pride, haughtiness and lethargy. After the student has learnt the Sastras, the Acharya gives the parting message thus:

"Speak the truth and do your allotted duty in life. Remember what you have learnt. Try to earn wealth by fair means and get married according to custom. Be thrifty in your expenditure but offer gifts in plenty with sympathy to deserving persons. Treat parents, teachers and guests as God. Respect the elders, perform the ceremonies stipulated by Sastras and help the poor".

"Matru Devo Bhava, Pitru DevoBhava, Acharya Devo Bhava, Atithi DevoBhava, Satyam Vada, Dharmam Chara"
"When you are in doubt as to how you should act in peculiar circumstances, consult pious, wise, virtuous and
competent elders and act as they would act.
This is the secret of Vedas.
This is the Command".

If a student acts up to the instructions, he is sure to progress in life and get the grace of God.

D: Sir, kindly tell me also the duties prescribed for a girl in our Sastras.

P: A high place is given to women in our society. She is the minister for home. To perform her duties properly she has to be educated like **Maitreyi,** and **Lilavathi** of yore. She has to study especially home science, child welfare, painting, music, physiology and home remedies for simple diseases. A girl after attaining puberty is forbidden to talk to strange men or have acquaintences with young men. She marries only the young man chosen for her by her parents. The consent of the girl is also obtained.

Marriage is a sacred function among the Hindus and it lasts for life. Great care is taken by parents to select a well-behaved, capable young man of good character from a good family devoid of congenital diseases. Love marriages arranged by the couple often end in misery as they mind only external beauty and not the other aspects for the successful, happy, harmonious life. Young people are not mature enough to consider all aspects.

The girl must be intelligent, educated, well-trained in house-keeping and capable of moving harmoniously and with humility with members of her husband's family. She has to prepare food, feed others and take her food afterwards. There is a Sanskrit Sloka which says that a wife should be a minister in giving advice to her husband, beautiful, faultless in character and a mother in feeding him.

"Karneshu mantri bhojyayshu Matha
Roopayshu Lakshmee Kuladharma Patnee"

She should look after the children and make them healthy, well-educated, brave and good-natured. She must be hospitable to her husband's guests and be the repository of our cultural heritage. Both men and women should be chaste. Man should abide by the promises he has made before the sacred fire to take care of his wife and make her happy.

D: Sir, Indian women known for chastity are said to have possessed wonderful powers.

P: In India divorces are rare. Both members (men and women) adjust themselves to each other's nature and there is generally harmony in home life. The wife shares her husband's joys and sorrows. Sita is an example. **Thiruvalluvar,** author of **Thirukural** (which is a treatise in Tamil on conduct and morality), says that a woman who regards her husband as God will have the power of bringing rain to the country at her will. **Savithri** saved her husband **Sathyavan** from the clutches of the God of Death because of her power of chastity. When her husband was unjustly executed by the Pandian king of Madurai, **Kannagi** burnt the city of Madurai by dint of her power of chastity. An Indian woman generally leads a spiritual life after the death of her husband.

D: Sir, in our marriage the couple undergo certain ceremonies, but their significance is not explained. May I know about their significance?

P: According to the Hindu Sastras and Apastamba Sutras, the young man who has selected a girl for marriage must send his friend to the girl's father to make the proposal. This is **Kanyavaranam**. The purpose of the marriage is to seek the cooperation of the wife in performing religious ceremonies and in producing good and pious children. That is why the wife is called **Dharma Padni.**

The Mantras recited during the marriage ceremony are those found in Rig Veda and recited during the marriage of Soman and Sooryai. The bride-groom prays to God to make him and his

bride well-united and prosperous, to make the bride good and dutiful to make her pleasing to her husband and his relations, to make her for ever devoted to God and to seek the welfare of human beings and domestic animals. This is **Vakdhana**. The bride-groom wipes the middle of her forehead with a blade of Kusa grass to wipe off any evil influences in her and then throws the blade of grass away behind her. The gold **Mangalyam** and a ring of Kusa grass are placed on the bride's head. A small wooden yoke with a hole in it is placed above the gold and a little water is poured through the hole thrice by the bridegroom who prays to God to remove any skin disease in her and make her pure and happy.

After bath the bride and the bridegroom get into new clothes. The bridegroom binds a string made of Kusa grass around the waist of the bride to render her fit for wedding rite. Then he leads her by holding her right hand and they sit before the sacred fire. He asks her to become the mistress of his house. He grips her hand so that he may have good children through her. This is called **Panigraha.**

Then during **Mangalya Dharana** the bridegroom ties the Mangalyam with the thread round the bride's neck with three knots. His sister helps him in this act. The bridegroom then takes hold of the bride's right foot and leads her towards the east making her take **Seven steps.** During each step he makes a request. This is called **Saptapadi.**

The Saptapadi constitutes the chief element of marriage. He prays to God to make his wife cooperate with him in getting plenty of food, in getting strength, in observing religious vows, in getting happiness, in caring for the cattle, in enjoying the good seasons and lastly in observing religious rites with him. This Saptapadi makes the marriage irrevocable and they become friends and partners in life. The bridegroom performs Homa in the fire and prays to God for their welfare.

After the oblation in the sacred fire is over, a stone is placed on the northern side of the fire. The bridegroom takes the right foot of the bride and places it on the stone asking her to be firm like the stone against her enemies or troubles in life.

Then **Laja Homa** is performed. The bride gets some fried rice from her brother. The bridegroom adds ghee to it and they both place it into the fire. The Laja Homa is done thrice to bring prosperity and long life to the couple. The couple then go round the fire. The bridegroom then unties the Kusa-cord round the waist of the bride. Agni deva, the God of fire. is considered to be the witness of their marriage and if any one of the partners goes astray Agni deva, it is believed, will prevent it by acting as their conscience. The **Grihapravesa Homam** is then performed in the Bridegroom's house.

After dusk when the stars appear, the bridegroom has to point to the **Arundati star** near the Vasishta star in the **Sapta Rishi** (or Great Bear) constellation. He asks his bride to be as chaste as Arundati, wife of **Vasishta Rishi**. He then points to the **Pole Star** in the North and asks her to be as steadfast as the pole star. The last is the **Sesha Homa** during which the bridegroom prays to God to shower His blessings on him and his wife and to ward off all evil forces.

D: Much is made of horoscopes. The evil custom of **dowry** still persists in our society bringing immense sufferings to the bride's father.

P: Too much consideration should not be paid to **horoscope.** Other aspects such as **health, education, temperament, intelligence, character** and **capacity to earn** are important. Mental agreement is the best. In these days of advanced science the bride and the bridegroom undergo all **blood tests** before marriage to find the suitability for producing good off - springs. As for dowry our Acharyas advise parents not to demand dowry and to celebrate the marriage in a simple way. But their advice falls on deaf ears of parents. **Young men should join together and take a vow not to accept dowry either in cash or in kind.**

17. A GARLAND OF HYMNS

"More things are wrought by prayers than the world dreams of" said Lord Tennyson in the poem "Mort de Arthur". Sage Parasara says in Vishnu Puranam (6-2-17). "One attains grace of God by meditation in Krithayuga, by sacrifices in Threta yuga, by worship in Dwapara yuga and by prayer in Kali yuga. Tulasidasa author of Ram charita manas says, "One can cross this ocean of worldly life and reach God by means of Nama Sangeerthana (Singing God's names)"

Suklam baradharam vishnum
sasivarnam chatur bhujam
Prassanna vadanam dhyayet
sarva vighnopa santaye.

(I offer my salutations to God Vishnu who is omnipresent, who wears white robes who is as bright and cool as the moon and who has a pleasant face. Let Him drive away all obstacles to my progress in life and give me peace of mind. This sloka is also addressed to **Vinayaka**.)

Om asutoma sud gamaya,
Tamasoma jyothir gamaya,
Mrityorma amrutam gamaya,
om saantih saantih saantih.

(Oh God, lead me from bad thoughts to good thoughts. Lead me from darkness to light. Lead

me from mortality to immortality.)
(Darkness refers to ignorance. Bruhadaranyaka Upanishad)

3. **Om chumno mitrah chum**
varunah, chumno bhavat varyama, chumna
indro bruhaspatih,
chumno vishnururukramah,
Namo brahmaney, namastay vayo,
tvameva pratyakshum Brahmaasi, tvameva
pratyaksham Brahma vadishyaami, ritam
vadishyami,
satyam vadishyami, tanmamavatu,
Tadvaktara mavatu, avatumaam,
Avatu vaktaarum,
om saantih, saantih, saantih.

(Let Mitra, Varuna, Aryama, Indra, Brahaspati and Vishnu bring prosperity to us. Salutation to Vayu. I regard you as Brahmam, ritam (beauty) and satyam (Truth). Let that Brahman protect me. Let Him protect my preceptor. Let peace reign everywhere-Taiteereopanishad. Satyam may also mean eternal existence.)

4. **Taccham yo-ravruneemahe, gaathum**
Yangnaya, gathum yangnapathayey
daiveessvastirastunah,
svastir manushebhiah, oordhvam
jigatu bheshajam, ehumno astu
dvipatey, chum chatushpaday,
om saantih, saantih, saantih.

(For the present and for the future we welcome earnestly such acts which give us peace. Let

sacrifices be performed. Let God's blessings be showered upon us. Let people prosper. Let plants grow up. Let two-legged people and four-legged animals be beneficial to us. Let peace reign every where.)

Om Sahanaa vavatu sahanav bhunaktu,
saha veeryam karava vahai,
Tejasvinava
dheetamastu ma vidvishavahai
om saantih, saantih, saantih.

(Let Brahmam protect us both - the teacher and the disciple. Let Him feed us with knowledge. Let Him help us work sincerely, harmonously and without differences so that the process of learning may be fruitful and bright.)

Gurur brahma gurur vishnur
gurur devo maheswara
gurur saakshaat param brahma
tasmy sri guruvay namah.
Tvameva maataacha pitaa tvameva
Tvameva banduscha sakha tvameva
Tvameva vidhya dravinam tvameva
Tvameva sarvam nama deva deva.

Guru(Teacher) is Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesvara to me. My salutations to Guru! You are all to me father, mother, relation and knowledge.

7. **Saraswati namastubhiam**
vanday kaama roopini
vidhyarambam karishyami
siddhir bavatumay sadha.

8. **Veena pustaka dharinee maasrayay**
vegavahinee vanee maavatu.

9. **Yatra yatra raghunatha keerthanam**
Tatra tatra kruta mastakanjalim
paashpavaari pari poorna lochanum
marutim namata rakshasa antakam.

10. **Buddhir balam yaso thyryam**
nirbhayatvam arogata
Ajaatyam vakpatuthvam cha
hanumath smaranaad bhavayth.

11. **Vasudeva sutam devam**
kamsachaanoora murdanam
Devaki paramaanandam krishnam
vantay jagat gurum.

12. **Santhaa kaaram bhujaga**
sayanam padmanaabham suresam
Visvadharam gaganasadrusam
megavarna subhaangam
Lakshmikantam kamalanayanam
yogi hiruddhyana gamyam
Vanday vishnum bhava bhayaharam
sarva lokykanaatham.

(I offer my solutations to Lord Vishnu who rests peacefully on the snake Adisesha as his bed, who

has a lotus flower in his navel, who is the Lord of all Devas, who is the support of the universe, who is like the sky, who is of the colour of clouds, who has beautiful limbs, who is dear to Lakshmi Devi, who has pretty eyes like lotus petals, who is meditated upon by Sages as residing in their hearts, who drives away all my fears and who is the Lord of all the worlds.

13. **Megasyamam peeta kausaya vasum**
srivatsangam kaustubodbhasitangam
punyopaytum pundareekayatakshum
vishnum vanday sarvalokykanaatham.

14. **Chaayaayaam paarijaatasya**
hayma simhasanopari
Aaseenam ambudasyaamum
aayataaksham alankrutam
chandraananum chaturbaahum
srivatsaankita vakshasum
Rukmanee satya bhaamaabiaam
sahitam krishnamaasrayay.

(Pundarikaayatakshum - eyes like petals of lotus. Hayma - gold, vakshasa - chest. Bhujaga - snake, peetakausaya vasam - dressed in yellowish silk robes. asrayay - take refuge)

15. **Kausalya Supraja Raama**
Poorva Sandhya Pravartatay
Uttishta narasaartula
kartavyam deiva mahnikam
uttishta uttishta govinda
uttishta garudadhvaja

uttishta kamalaakanta
trylokyam mangalam kuru
matas samasta jagataam
madhukytabharay
vaksho vihaarini manohara
divya moortay
Sri swamini priyadaana cheelay
Sri venkatesa dayitay
tava suprabhaatam.

(This is the morning prayer to Sri Venketeswara, Lord of the seven hills. Oh Raama, resplendent son of Kausalya! The day has dawned and the time has come for morning prayers. Please rise up. Govinda who has the flag of Garuda! Lord of Lakshmi! Please get up and do good to the three worlds. Mahalakshmi, the mother of the three worlds! You reside in the bosom of Lord Vishnu. You are his love. You fulfill the wishes of your devotees. Let this be an auspicious dawn to all.)

16. **Bhaja govindam bhaja govindam**
govindam bhaje mootamate
samprapte sannihitekalay
nahi nahi rakshati dukrunjkaranay.

(This is the song of Adi Sankara and also songs 17 to 19 He exhorts people to worship Govinda and says that any amount of learning alone will not be useful at the time of soul's departure from this world. Be content. Dont be greedy, study Gita and recite Vishnu Sahasranamam. Practise Yoga. Give alms.)

7. **Mootajahihi dhanaagama**
thrushnaam kurusad buddhim
manasi vithrushnaam
Yalla bhasay nija karmo paatham
vittamtheyna vinodaya chittam.

8. **Geyam Gita nama sahasram**
Dhiayyam sripaty roopamajasrum
Neyam sajjana sangay chittam
Deyam deena janaya cha vittam.

9. **Praanayaamum pratiahaarum**
Nityaanitya viveka vichaaram
Japiasameta samaadhi vidhaanum
Kurva vadhaanam mahadava dhanum.

10. **Tasmaat pranaamya pranidaayakaayam**
prasaadaye tvamaham easameetyam
Piteva putrasya, sakeva, sakhyuh
Priyah priyayarhasi devasodum.

(This is the prayer of Arjuna to Lord Krishna in Bhagavad Geeta. Hymns 20 to 22. "Oh Lord, I prostrate before you and surrender myself. Most worshipful Lord! Forgive my faults just as a father or a friend.)

Pitasi lokasya chara charasya
Tvamasya poojyascha gurur gariyaan
Na tvat samost yabia dhikah kutoneyo
Lokatrayeybia pratimaprabhaava.

(You are the father of the world of sentient beings and insentient things. You are the one to be worshipped. You are the teacher to all. None is equal to you in power and glory.)

(Bhagavan Narayana is omnipresent. He is present in everything that is seen or heard, inside and outside. Only Lord Narayana is the Supreme God. He is the supreme Light - Narayana Suktam.)

30. **Karaara vindeyna padaaravindam**
Mukaaravinday vinivey sayantam
Vatasya patrasya putay sayaanam
Balam Mukundam manasaasmaraami.

(This is a song of Bilvamangal from his Krishna Karnamrutam, highly appreciated by Chaitanya and translated into Bengali by him. "I pay my homage to Mukunda (Lord Krishna) who is resting on the banyan leaf holding his lotus feet with his lotus hand and placing it on his lotus face.)

31. **Kastooree tilakam lalaata**
phalakay vakshasthalay kaustubham
Naasaagray nava mouktikam
karathalay venum karay kanganum
Sarvaangay hari chandanam cha
kalayan kantay cha muktavalim
Gopastree pariveshtitay vijayatay
gopala choodaamani.

(This is also from Krishna Karnamrutam. Lalata phalakay - on the broad forehead. Vakshasthalay on the chest. Naasagrey - tip of the nose. Nava mouktikam - new pearl, Venum - flute, Kantay - on the neck.)

32. **Hiranya varnaam harineem**
swarna rajatasrajaam
chantraam hiranmayeem lakshmeem
jatavedoma maavaha.

(This sloka is from Sri Suktam. "Let Goddess Lakshmi who shines like gold, who forgives my sins, who is adorned with gold and silver ornaments and whose face shines like the moon visit my house to shower blessings on me".)

33. **Sarva mangala mangalyay**
sivey sarvartha sadhikay
Saranyey triambikay gowri
narayanee namastutay.

34. **Nata vintukalati namo nama**
Veda mantra svarupa namo nama
Gnana pandita swami namo nama
- bahukodi
(by Arunagiri in Chenchuruti raga)

35. **Krishnaanee bayganay baarow**
Bayganay baaro mujjagavannay toro -
(Krishna)

(By Kanagadas in yamuna raga. Krishna! come quickly and show your mouth so that I may see all the three worlds within you.)

36. **Aalola tulasi vanamaala bhushana**
Sri raama raama haray - sriman
narayana krishna govinda jagannatha
purushotama paalaya.

Nanda nandana induvadana
Sri raama raama haray - sriman
Dasaratha baala dasamukha kaala
sri raama raama haray.

(By Bhadrachala Ramadas in Sankara-paranam)

37. **Paahi madanagopala mukunda**
paalita muchukunda
Nanda nandana nandita munijana
mandahaasa Vadana haray Krishna.

(By Vijaya Gopaladas in Thodi Raga)

38. **Bhajare gopaalam heymanasa (Bhajare)**
Bhaja Gopaalam bhajita kuchelam
Trijagan moolam ditisutakaalam
Aagama saaram yoga vichaaram
Bhoga sareeram bhuvanaadhaaram.

(Sadasiva Bhramendra in Hindola Raga, Adi Tala.)

39. **Tava daasoham tavadaasoham tava**
daasoham daasarathay
Varamrudu bhasha viruhita
dosha naravara vesha daasarathay.

(By saint Tyagaraja in Punnagavarali Raga.)

40. **Raama raama namostutay**
jayaraama bhadra namostutay
Raamachandra namostutay jaya
raaghavaya namostutay
Deva deva namostutay

Jaya devaraja namostutay
Vasudeva namostutay jaya
veeraraaja namostutay
(Adi Sankara).

41. Haray raama, haray raama,
raama raama haray haray,
Haray krishna, haray krishna
krishna krishna haray haray.

42. Raama raama raama raama
raama naama taarakam
Raama krishna vasudeva
bhukti mukti daayakam
Jaanaki manoharam
Sarvaloka naayakam
Sankaraadi sevyamana
punnyanaama keertanam.

43. Ksheerabdi sayana Naaraayana
Sri Lakshmi ramana Naaraayana
Naaraayana hari Naaraayana
natha jana paripala Naaraayana
vaikunda vasa Naaraayana
Vaidehi ramana Naaraayana
Naaraayana hari Naaraayana
Narahari roopa Naaraayana.

44. Nanda nandana Gopaala
Navaneeta Chora Gopala
Madhura nutta Gopaala
Murali manohara Gopaala
Bhaktavatsala Gopaala
Radha ramana Gopaala
Raasilola Gopaala.

45. Raama Raama pahimaam
Mukunda Raama pahimaam
megashyamam pahimaam
Aatma Raama pahimaam
Akhanda Raama pahimaam
Saantaa Raama pahimaam
Seetaa Raama pahimaam.

46. Krishna Raama Govinda,
haray Raama Krishna Govinda.
Krishna Kesava Govinda,
haray Raama Krishna Govinda.
Nanda nandana Govinda,
haray Raama Krishna Govinda.
Vijayala Gopala Govinda,
haray Raama Krishna Govinda.

47. Dasaratha Nandana Raam Raam,
dasamukha murdanaraam Raam.
Pasupati ranjana Raam Raam,
papa vimochana Raam Raam.

48. Raamaaya Raamabhadraya
Raamachandraaya vedasay
Raghunaathaaya Nathaaya
Sitaayaah patayay namah.

49. Sri Krishna Govinda haray Muraaray
Kesava Naaraayana Vaasudeva.

50. Syama sundara madana mohana
Brindavana vihaari,
brindaavana vihaari
govardhana giridhaari.

51. Krishna Raam Raam Govinda hari hari
Krishna Raam Raam Govinda Kesava
Krishna Raam Raam Govinda Madhava
Vishno Sadaananda Venugopaala baala.

52. Namaami Naaraayana paada pankajam,
karomi Naaraayana bhoojanam sadaa,
vadaami Naaraayana naama nirmalam
Smaraami Naaraayana tatvam
avyayam.

53.
Yamunaa teera vihari,
bhrindaavana Sanjaari
Govardhanoddhari,
Gopaala Krishna Muraari.

54.
Sarva dharman parityajya
mamekam charanam vraja
Aham tva sarva papebhiomoksha
ishyami ma suchah.

55. Jaya Mangalam nitya subhamangalam
Mangalam Rukminee .
ramanaya srimatay
mangalam ramaneeya moorthayaytay
Mangalam srivatsa
bhushaaya saaranginay
Mangalam nandagopaatma jaaya (jaya)

(By Narayana theerta in Punnaga varali Raga, Jamba Tala.)

1. शुक्लाम्बरधरं विष्णुं शशिवर्णं चतुर्भुजम्।
प्रसन्नवदनं ध्यायेत् सर्व विघ्नोपशान्तये।।

2. ॐ असतो मा सद गमय।
तमसो मा ज्योतिर्गमय।
मृत्योर्मा अमृतं गमय।।
ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः

3. ॐ शंनो मित्रः शं वरुणः। शं नो भवत्वर्यमा। शं न इन्द्रो भृहस्पतिः शंनो विष्णुरुरुक्रमः। नमो ब्रह्मणे। नमस्ते वायो। त्वमेव प्रत्यक्षं ब्रह्मासि। त्वमेव प्रत्यक्षं ब्रह्म वदिष्यामि। ऋतं वदिष्यामि। सत्यं वदिष्यामि। तन्मामवतु। तद्क्तार - मवतु। अवतु मां। अवतु वक्तारं।।
ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः

4. तच्छंयो रावृणीमहे। गातुं यज्ञाय। गातुं यज्ञपतये। दैवीस्स्वस्ति - रस्तु नः स्वस्ति - र्मानुषेभ्यः। ऊर्ध्वं जिगातु भेषजम्। शं नो अस्तु द्विपदे। शं चतुष्पदे। ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः

5. ॐ सह नाववतु। सह नौ भुनक्तु। सह वीर्यं
करवावहै। तेजस्विनावधीतमस्तु मा विद्विषावहै।।
ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः

6. गुरुर्ब्रह्मा गुरुर्विष्णु गुरुर्देवो महेश्वरः।
गुरुः साक्षात् परंब्रह्म तस्मै श्री गुरवे नमः।।
त्वमेव माता च पिता त्वमेव
त्वमेव बन्धुश्च सखा त्वमेव।
त्वमेव विद्या द्रविणं त्वमेव
त्वमेव सर्वं मम देव देव।।

7. सरस्वति नमस्तुभ्यं वंदे कामरूपिणि।
विद्यारम्भं करिष्यामि सिद्धि र्भवतु मेसदा।।

8. वीणापुस्तक धारिणीमाश्रये।
वेगवाहिनी वाणी मावतु।।

9. यत्र यत्र रघुनाथकीर्तनं तत्र तत्र कृतमस्तकांञ्जलिम।
बाष्पवारि परिपूर्ण लोचनं मारुतिं नमत
राक्षसान्तकम।।

10. बुद्धिर्बलं यशो थैर्यं निर्भयत्वमरोगता।
अजाड्यं वाक्पडुत्वंच हनूमत्स्मरणाद् भवेत्।।

11. वसुदेवसुतं देवं कंस चाणूरमर्दनम्।
देवकी परमानन्दं कृष्णं वन्दे जगद्गुरुम्।।

12. शान्ताकारं भुजगशयनं पद्मनाभं सुरेशं
विश्वाकारं गगनसदृशं मेघवर्णं शुभाङ्गम्।
लक्ष्मीकान्तं कमलनयनं योगिहृद्ध्यानगम्यं
वन्दे विष्णुं भवभयहरं सर्वलोकैकनाथम्।।

13. मेघश्यामं पीतकौशेयवासं
श्रीवत्साङ्कं कौस्तुभोद्भासिताङ्गम्।
पुण्योपेतं पुण्डरीकायताक्षं
विष्णुं वन्दे सर्वलोकैकनाथम्।।

14. छायायां पारिजातस्य हेमसिंहासनोपरि।
आसिनमम्बुदश्याममायताक्ष मलंकृतम्।।
चन्द्राननं चतुर्बाहुं श्रीवत्साङ्कितवक्षसम।
रुक्मिणीसत्यभामाभ्यां सहितं कृष्णमाश्रये।।

15. कौसल्या सुप्रजाराम पूर्वा सन्ध्या प्रवर्तते।
उत्तिष्ट नरशार्दूल कर्तव्यं दैवमाह्निकम्।।
उत्तिष्ठोत्तिष्ठ गोविन्द उत्तिष्ठ गरुडध्वज।
उत्तिष्ठ कमलाकान्त त्रैलोक्यं मंगलं कुरु।।
मातः समस्त जगतां मधुकैटभारेः
वक्षोविहारिणि मनोहर दिव्यमूर्ते।

श्रीस्वामिनि श्रितजनप्रियदानशीले
श्रीवेंकटेशदयिते तव सुप्रभातम्।।

भज गोविन्दं भज गोविन्दं भज गोविन्दं मूढमते।
संप्राप्ते सन्निहिते काले नहि नहि रक्षसिडुकृञ्
करणे।

मूढ जहिहि घनागमतृष्णां
कुरु सद्बुद्धिं मनसि वितृष्णाम्।
यल्लभसे निजकर्मोपात्तं
वित्तं तेन विनोदय चित्तम्।।

गेयं गोता नामसहस्रम्
ध्येयं श्रीपतिरूपमजस्रम्।
नेयं सज्जनसङ्गे चित्तं
देयं दीनजनाय च वित्तम्।।

प्राणायामं प्रत्याहारं
नित्यानित्यविवेकविचारम्।
जाप्यसमेतसमाधिविधानं
कुर्ववधानं महदवधानम्।।

20. तस्मात् प्रणम्य प्रणिधाय कायं
प्रसादये त्वामह मीशमीड्यम्
पितेव पुत्रस्य सखेव सख्युः।
प्रियः प्रियायार्हसि देव सोढुम्।।

21. पितासि लोकस्य चराचरस्य
त्वमस्य पूज्यश्च गुरुर्गरीयान्।
न त्वत्समो स्त्यभ्यधिकः कुतोऽन्यो
लोकत्रयेऽप्यप्रतिमप्रभाव।।

22. किरीटिनं गदिनं चक्रहस्त -
मिच्छामि त्वां द्रष्टुमहं तथैव।
तेनैव रूपेण चतर्भुजेन
सहस्रबाहो भव विस्वमूर्ते।।

23. ॐ पूर्णमदः पूर्णमिदं पूर्णात्पूर्णमुदच्यते।
पूर्णस्य पर्णमादाय पूर्णमेवावाशिष्यते।।

24. अनन्याश्चिन्तयन्तो मां ये जनाः पर्युपासते।
तेषां नित्याभियुक्तानां योगक्षेमं वहाम्यहम्।।

25. आर्ता विषण्णाः शिथिलाश्च भीताः
घोरेषु च व्याधिषु वर्तमानाः

संकीर्त्य नारायणशब्दमात्रं
विमुक्तदु:खा: सुखिनो भवन्तु।।

26. श्री राम राम रामेति रमे रामे मनोरमे।
सहस्रनामतत्तुल्यं रामनाम वरानने।।

27. वनमाली गदी शार्ङ्गी शङ्खी चक्री च नन्दकी।
श्रीमान्नारायणो विष्णुर्वासुदेवोऽभिरक्षतु।।

28. वेदाहमेतं पुरुषं महान्तम्।
आदित्यवर्णं तमसः परस्तात्।
तमेवं विद्वानमृत इह भवति।
नान्यः पन्था विद्यतेऽयनाय।।

29. नारायण परं ब्रह्म तत्वं नारायणः परः।
नारायण परो ज्योतिरात्मा नारायणः परः।।
यच्च किञ्चिज्जगत्सर्वं दृश्यते श्रूयतेऽपि वा।
अन्तर्बहिश्च तत्सर्वं व्याप्य नारायणः स्थितः

30. करारविन्देन पदारविन्दं
मुखारविन्दे विनिवे शयन्तम्।
वटस्य पत्रस्य पुटे शयानं
बालं मुकुन्दं मनसा स्मरामि।।

31. कस्तूरी तिलकं ललाटफलके वक्षःस्थले कौस्तुभं।
नासाग्रे नव मौक्तिकं करतले वेणुं करे कङ्गणं।
सर्वाङ्गे हरिचन्दनं च कलयन कण्टे च मुक्तावलिं
गोपस्त्री परिवेष्टिते विजयते गोपाल चूडामणिः॥

32. हिरण्य वर्णां हरिणीं स्वर्ण रजतस्त्रजाम्।
चन्द्रां हिरण्मयीं लक्ष्मीं जातवेदो ममावह॥

33. सर्वमङ्गल माङ्गल्ये शिवे सर्वार्थ साधिके।
शरण्ये त्रियंबिके गौरी नारायणी नमोस्तु ते॥

34. नाद विन्तुकलाति नमो नम
वेदमन्त्र स्वरूप नमो नम
ज्ञान पंडित स्वामि नमो नम - बहुकोडि॥

35. कृष्णा नी बेगने बारो।
बेगनेबारो मुजगवन्ने तोरो। - कृष्णा

36. आलोल तुलसी वनमाला भूषण
श्री राम राम हरे - श्रीमन्।
नारायण कृष्ण गोविन्द जगन्नाथ
पुरुषोत्तम पालय॥
नन्दनन्दन इन्दुवदन श्री राम राम हरे - श्रीमन्
दशरथबाल दसमुख काल श्री राम राम हरे॥

37. पाहि मदन गोपाल मुकुन्द पालित मुचुकुन्द
नन्द नन्दन नन्दित मुनिजन
मन्दहास वदनहरे कृष्ण - पाहि।।

38. भजरे गोपालं हे मानस भजरे गोपालं।।
भज गोपालं भजित कुचेलं
त्रिजगन्मूलं दिति सुतकालं।।
आगम सारं योगविचारं
भोग शरीरं भुवनाधारं - भजरे।।

39. तवदा सोहं तवदासोहं
तवदासोहं दाशरथे।
वरम्रुदुभाष विरहितदोष
नरवरवेष दाशरथे - तव।।

40. राम राम नमोस्तु ते जयरामभद्र नमोस्तु ते
रामचन्द्र नमोस्तु ते जय रागवाय नमोस्तु ते
देव देव नमोस्तु ते जय देवराज नमोस्तु ते
वासुदेव नमोस्तु ते जयवीर राज नमोस्तु ते।।

41. हरे राम हरे राम राम राम हरे हरे
हरे कृष्ण हरे कृष्ण कृष्ण कृष्ण हरे हरे।।

42. राम राम राम राम राम नाम तारकम्
राम कृष्ण वासुदेव भुक्ति मुक्ति दायकम्
जानकी मनोहरम् सर्वलोक नायकम्
शंकरादि सेव्यमान पुण्यनामकीर्तनम्।।

43. क्षीराब्धि शयन नारायण
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वैदेही रमण नारायण
नारायण हरि नारायण
नरहरी रूप नारायण।।

44. नन्द नन्दन गोपाल
नवनीत चोर गोपाल
मधुरनुत्त गोपाल
मुरलि मनोहर गोपाल
भक्तवत्सल गोपाल
राधारमण गोपाल
रासि लोल गोपाल।।

45. राम राम पाहिमाम्
मुकुन्त राम पाहिमाम्
मेघश्याम पाहिमाम्
आद्मराम पाहिमाम्
अखण्ड राम पाहिमाम्
शान्त राम पाहिमाम्
सीताराम पाहिमाम्।।

46. कृष्णा राम गोविन्द हरे रामकृष्ण गोविन्द
कृष्णा कैशव गोविन्द हरे रामकृष्ण गोविन्द
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विजयाल गोपाल गोविन्द हरे राम कृष्ण गोविन्द।।

47. दसरथ नन्दन राम् राम् दशमुख मर्दन राम् राम्
पशुपति रंजन राम् राम् पापविमोचन राम्
राम्।।

48. रामाय रामभद्राय रामचन्द्राय वेदसे।
रघुनाथाय नाथाय सीतायाः पतये नमः।।

49. श्री कृष्ण गोविन्द हरे मुरारे
केशव नारायण वासुदेव।।

50. श्याम सुन्दर मदनमोहन बृन्दावन विहारी
बृन्दावन विहारि गोवर्तन गिरिदारि

51. कृष्णा राम् राम् गोविन्द हरि हरि
कृष्णा राम् राम् गोविन्द केशव
कृष्णा राम् राम् गोविन्दं मादव
विष्णो सदानन्दं वेणुगोपाल बाल

52. नमामि नारायण पादपंकजं
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वदामि नारायण नाम निर्मलम्
स्मरामि नारायण तत्वं अव्ययम्।।

53. यमुना तीर विहारी भृन्दावन सञ्चारी
गोवर्धनोद्धारी गोपाल कृष्ण मुरारिः।।

54. सर्वधर्मान्परित्यज्य मामेकं शरणं व्रज।
अहं त्वा सर्वपापेभ्यो मोक्षयिष्यामि मा शुचः।।

55. जय मङ्गलं नित्य शुभ मङ्गलं
मङ्गलं रुक्मिणी रमणाय श्रीमते
मङ्गलं रमणीयमूर्तये ते
मङ्गलं श्रीवत्सभूषाय शार्ङ्गिणे
मङ्गलं नन्दगोपात्मजाय।। जय।।

SOME OF THE REVIEWS TO THE TAMIL EDITION

1. THE HINDU (A POPULAR DAILY)

The book under review is a commendable effort towards projecting the essentials of Hinduism and explaining the areas of difference in simple terms under the various religious groups. It is not just a narration of philosophical principles. Synoptic accounts of saints, sages and preceptors, the significance of religious festivals - all these and more which every common Hindu must know about his faith have been given in this publication. The Author deserves praise for adopting the dialectical method which is at once the most convenient and effective way of conveying information.

2. THE DINAMANI (A POPULAR DAILY)

This book effectively explains the greatness of Hinduism in the form of a dialogue between a Guru and his disciple. Advaita, Visishtadvaita, Dvaita and other Siddhantas have been clearly explained. The principles of other religions have also been given to compare with the great philosophical principles of Hinduism.

This book will be very useful to the preachers of Hindu religion also. Every Hindu family should have a copy of this book. To establish the Hindu Dharma, to make it lively and vibrant and to prevent conversion of poor ignorant Hindus to other religions several suggestions have been given in the chapter "Hinduism as the mother of all religions".

If these suggestions are carried out, there will be a fresh renaissance for Hinduism. The author should be congratulated on his commendable effort.

3. THE NRISIMHA PRIYA (A MONTHLY JOURNAL OF THE AHOBILA MUTT)

Every Hindu especially young men and women should study this book. When atheism is spreading nowadays, the study of this book will drive away disbelief and ignorance of our religion. "Is image worship necessary? What is the significance of rituals and festivals? What is Aatma?" Correct and convincing answers have been given to these questions.

Hindus will be greatly benefited by studying this book. Non-Hindus can realise the greatness and glories of Hinduism.

4. SRI RAMAKRISHNA VIJAYAM (A MONTHLY JOURNAL OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA MUTT, MADRAS)

The dialogue in this book clearly conveys the greatness of the principles of Hindu religion and its practice. This book explains in an intelligible and simple way the Advaita, Visishtadvaita and the Dvaita Siddhantas, the achievements and life-sketch of saints and preceptors, significance and importance of festivals and also gives short notes on the principles of other religions for the sake of comparison. Hymns that have been appended will be greatly useful for daily recital.

5. SRI N. SRINIVASA CHARIAR, M.A.L.T. (SANSKRIT SCHOLAR AND RTD. HEADMASTER OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA MISSION MAIN HIGH SCHOOL, MADRAS - 17).

Sri S. Narayanan, B.Sc., L.T., popular author of a number of excellent text books on science for high schools deserves our warmest congratulations for his excellent venture in the sphere of religion and philosophy.

In this present book on the exposition of Hindu Dharma he has dealt with a wide range of topics covering the broad principles of Hindu religion, other allied religions of our country and the impact of our religion on foreign countries, as well as the lives of sages, saints and Acharias who have been the greatest exponents of our philosophical truths and the cuslodians of our hoary heritage.

This book which is in the form of Catechism is expected to serve as a valuable guide to the earnest student who wishes to know about Hinduism and an eye-opener to the lay-man and non-Hindus desirous of undertanding our religion and the firm foundation on which it stands.

The sprinkling of relevent quotations from scriptures and great men along with the appendix containing select hymns and verses enhances the worth of this book.

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